

Hugh Gash (editor)

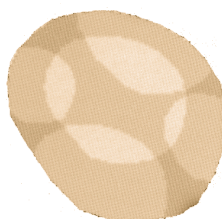
**B**eginning teachers  
and diversity in school:  
A European  
Study



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Hugh Gash (editor)

# Beginning teachers and diversity in school: A European Study



SÉRIE

*Estudos*

EDIÇÃO DO INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE BRAGANÇA

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We would like to express our thanks also to the teachers and school principals who took part in the study.

# Institutional support

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This book is about research undertaken within a Comenius 2.1 project supported by the European Commission designed to improve the systems in place to educate beginning teachers to help children who are in some difficulty in primary and secondary schools. Earlier publications have examined ways teachers think about children's difficulties in "Learning difficulties: What types of help in and out of class?" (2001), and the legal and institutional ways of providing for these difficulties in "Diversités des besoins éducatifs; des réponses en Europe et ailleurs." (2004). This final volume in the series on the project is about the ways beginning teachers perceive the varieties of problems children have in the classrooms and our collective reflections on how to improve the preparation of these teachers to help the children in difficulty. A variety of research methods were used including research action, and we were joined by colleagues from Brazil. Our approach is systemic in the sense that the work with teachers allows teacher education institutions to reflect on these findings so as to improve their teacher education processes for children.

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# Part One

## Introduction

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The work described here was undertaken with a view to preventing school failure in the broadest sense. It took place between 2001 and 2005 and was funded by the European Commission through the Comenius 2.1 programme that provides funding to educational institutions to improve the education of staff in schools by sharing good ideas and so improve the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. We were fortunate to have had colleagues from Brazil join us so giving a Latin American dimension to our thinking. In this volume colleagues from the Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres de Versailles, the Universidad de Zaragoza, Università degli Studi di Bari, Escola Superior de Educação de Bragança, the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, and from St Patrick's College Dublin took part in the work.

This book is intended to contribute to reflections on teacher education, and in particular on how well young teachers are educated to meet the challenges presented by pupils who are in some difficulty in primary and secondary schools. We hope that this work will stimulate discussion both within teacher education institutions, and provide a European perspective to readers in all sections of the educational community in their thinking about the central problem of preventing school failure and promoting a genuinely inclusive context for all pupils in schools.

The work described here was based on information pro-

vided by pre-service and beginning in-service teachers early in their careers. The strategies used in each country were essentially the same though local constraints required flexible approaches to the data collection. Questionnaires were used to assess the views of pre-service teachers and interviews and action research were used with beginning teachers regarding their experiences of children who were experiencing difficulties with their schooling. One aim was to find out how to better educate teachers to provide help to children in difficulty. So the study was in part a reflection of teachers on their work, and in part an opportunity to facilitate helpful criticism of teacher education provision so that institutions responsible for teacher education could improve their practices.

The context for the present work is that in the first part of our project (C.Rault, S.Molina, & H.Gash, 2001) we noticed differences in the approaches taken in partner countries and in teacher's perceptions of causes and solutions to children's difficulties. From one country to another, there were variations both in the school-parent relationship and in the relationships between schools and the various partners that support teacher's work, for example, remedial teachers, psychological services and speech therapists. In a second phase of the project we focused on the legal and institutional contexts for inclusion in each country, together with an analysis of the meaning of special educational needs in each country and the provision made for it in teacher education (Rault, 2004).

The present volume presents the work undertaken in each country in Part One, and in Part Two a collective synthesis of all the work is presented.

Staff with responsibility for teacher education wrote the chapters. So the chapters allow insight into the particular educational cultures in each different country, and to the problems experienced in schools by young teachers, including the relations between teachers and their schools, their educational partners, their pupils and parents. These reflections emerge strongly in the chapters by our colleagues in France, Ireland and Italy.

Issues also emerged relating to teacher education central to helping young teachers work with their pupils in difficulty in schools. There are questions about the balance between work undertaken in pre-service education and the work more appropriately done in in-service education as part of life-long education (Ireland). There is the perennial question on the relation between theory and practice and the associated matter of the importance of the images of both teachers and pupils that arises strongly in the French and Italian chapters. There are issues about the way teaching practice is managed and how to organise this (Spain) and the relation between the state and the institution (Italy). Implicit in all this research are the relations between the teacher education institutions and the schools and these are explicitly mentioned in the Italian chapter.

Fundamental to helping children in some difficulties is the



degree to which young teachers are adequately prepared to work with such children in their teacher education programmes. How are the children in need identified and how are they helped? This issue is central to our work. This work invites teacher educators to think about the systems in place to educate teachers about this dimension of education and challenges us to improve them for the benefit of children.

Hugh Gash,  
Editor.



# French beginning teachers confront special educational needs in some of their pupils

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Jean-Pierre CROISY, Marie-Paule JOLLEC, Claudie RAULT,  
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Versailles

## 1 • Introduction

### 1.1 • The context of this study

The present study grew out of reflections on a previous study entitled: “Learning difficulties: what types of help in and outside the class?”<sup>1</sup>. That research focused on primary teachers’ representations of and educational responses to children’s school difficulties.

The conclusions of that study revealed that teachers’ ideas concerning the causes of school failure were linked mostly to factors external to teaching. They mentioned either pupils’ deficiencies, or social or family problems or to a lesser degree, poor teaching conditions in the school. If these teachers did not consider themselves responsible for their pupils’ failure, most of them however felt

concerned about the pupils' long-term success, though they could not agree on the types of help that should be provided to them.

We noted great diversity in the perception of teachers' roles and personal and professional involvement concerning the implementation of specific responses. The importance and type of help that can be brought in by families and outside agencies, and whether or not the agencies are institutional partners, were also perceived in many different ways.

Our investigation of this diversity could indeed be investigated along with the diversity of teachers' conceptions regarding the origins of learning difficulties, but it also had to be related to the human and structural resources available, as well as to the official position of the school institution on this issue in each country. Eventually it had to be made clear thanks to the historical context of each education system.

Two main findings came out of that study:

- the conceptual and institutional environment of the teachers is a decisive element in their position regarding the success of their pupils;
- understanding the learning processes allows the teacher to grasp better the importance of the quality of attention to be paid to the pupils, of the diversity of educational approaches, of the quality of classroom interaction, and of the ability to work with other partners.

Thus it put an emphasis on the place that had to be given to the consideration of pupils' special educational needs from pre-service education onwards to in-service education.

## **1.2 · The purpose of this study**

Our intention in this new study is to assess how beginning teachers, both in primary and secondary education, can provide for the special educational needs of some of their pupils.

The research described here in France was designed to:

- collect data based on a questionnaire given to students at the end of pre-service education.
- collect beginning teachers' discourse recorded during workshops on their practice
- gather observations of the teaching practice of some teachers in their classes
- accompany some teachers in order to help them identify and analyse their difficulties in relation to handling groups of pupils with different ability levels.

The results described here were studied separately in each country and analysed comparatively by the partners of the different countries involved. The collection of all these studies was published along with recommendations regarding teacher education<sup>2</sup>.

## **2 · The methodology used for this study**

### **2.1 · The questionnaire data collected at the end of pre-service education**

Data were collected using a questionnaire given to the teachers at the end of the last year of their study. After pilot testing in France the questionnaire was accepted by the European partners involved in the project. Its aim was to enrich the context of the action research, to describe teachers' representations about special educational needs, to assess their feelings about the relevance of their pre-service education, to set a frame to analyse observations in class, and eventually to draw comparisons between the different countries using the same tool.

After collecting demographic information about the students<sup>3</sup>, four open questions were asked:

1. In your practice, you have met pupils with special educational needs. What were they?
2. Can you give at least one example which shows how you identified and analysed the difficulty and what solutions you proposed?
3. On this occasion, did you feel you needed additional in-service courses or help? If so, explain.
4. What were the pre-service courses and processes which provided you with expertise in this domain?

Initial content analysis of the responses gave a specification of categories allowing subsequent comparative analysis of results<sup>4</sup>.

### **2.2 · Follow-up study of beginning teachers during their first teaching year**

#### **2.2.1 · Methodology used in primary level**

The data collected and analysed result in part from the observation of nine teachers in their classes and in part from discussions carried out during an "induction course" for beginning teachers. The twenty-six teachers had all had some practice with pre-elementary (3/6 years) and elementary (6/12 years) pupils during their pre-service education.

#### **2.2.2 · Methodology used in secondary level**

Two groups of lower and upper secondary school teachers working in different conditions were studied: the first group consisted of beginning teachers willing to benefit from the help offered within the COMENIUS project. The follow up study relied on observation and analysis of class visits and focused mainly on assessment of and responses to special educational needs. The second group was composed of student teachers in charge of classes in lower and upper

secondary schools for six hours a week and attending pre-service education at the IUFM (teacher education institution) for twelve hours a week.

Discussions between teachers and teacher educators to analyse professional practice take place in meetings like these as an integral part of pre-service education. They make it possible for a group to discuss the difficulties encountered each two months. Questions from group members and the teacher educator are meant to help the teacher consider the difficulties from a distance and be open to other approaches so as to analyse and respond to them. In each group, twelve teachers teaching different curricular areas were studied for this research. The context facilitated data collection from teachers' discussions and educators' observations.

The analysis was carried out in two stages. A first stage consisted in linguistic analysis of the interviews using the categories selected for the common framework by all the members of this research group. It resulted in sorting out the data collected in terms of identifying and analysing pupils' needs, teachers' responses and the difficulties they had to implement them.

This first analysis did not allow us to take into account the appearance of other criteria that seemed relevant. It seemed important to analyse how the teachers talked about the "symptoms" and the criteria they had selected, as well as their ability to reveal their needs for additional training or support.

In the second stage the observations made during class visits and the subsequent analysis made with a teacher educator, allowed us to measure the degree of divergence or convergence between talk on the practice and practice itself. These new elements allowed us to enrich our reflection.

### **3 · Teachers' identification of pupils' difficulties**

#### **3.1 · Indices selected by teachers**

##### **3.1.1 · Questionnaire data collected from student teachers at the end of pre-service education**

The first question "during your practice you have met pupils with special difficulties; what were they?" was answered by most teachers with examples. This shows that a great majority of the teachers surveyed encounter educational difficulties in their pupils, whatever the school level they teach in. Analysis of their answers indicates two major domains of difficulties; learning difficulties and behavioural ones.

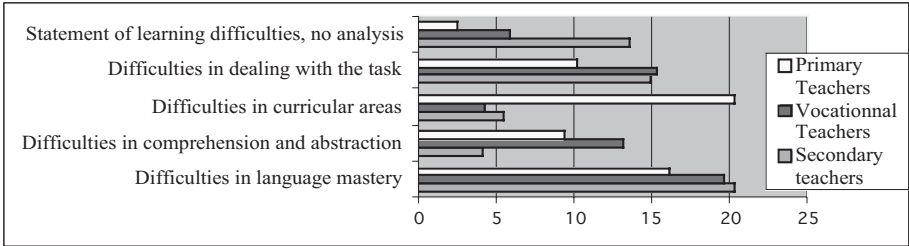
##### **• Pupils' learning difficulties**

Contrary to hypotheses we might make considering the media emphasis on teachers' malaise and school violence, pupils' disruptive behaviours in class do not rank first amongst pupil difficul-

ties. Indeed the analysis of the responses points out that learning difficulties are the most often mentioned (about 60 % of the answers) by teachers. Moreover, if 13.5% of lower and upper secondary school teachers are content with a general statement of the difficulties, primary school teachers are more precise and identify the nature of the difficulty (with only 2.5% giving general answers).

Nearly all teachers and especially secondary teachers emphasise language difficulties. Also we note that teachers of vocational secondary schools identify abstraction and understanding problems to a large extent. A reason for this, we think, is that these teachers are more concerned by this kind of difficulty since pupils with difficulties in these domains are very often directed to vocational schools.

Table 1: Analysis of learning difficulties



*Here 2.5% of the elements mentioned by primary student teachers concern learning difficulties without analysing them*

It is noticeable that primary student teachers pay the most attention to insufficient mastery of curricular areas whereas secondary and vocational student teachers are more concerned by pupils' difficulties in the way they deal with school tasks (lack of autonomy, concentration and organisation problems ...).

A possible interpretation of this statement might be that primary student teachers consider this difficulty as a major one since they may feel uneasy coping with all the subjects they teach. We can think that their training at university, focused on one subject only, gives them less ability to answer the needs of pupils when very different curricular domains are at stake. The situation is different for secondary school teachers. Their university education, focussing on one subject, puts them comparatively more at ease in dealing with these kinds of difficulties, yet it seems to have given them fewer tools to cope with pupils who have not yet acquired autonomy and efficient working methods. Finally, a teacher's continuous presence with pupils at primary school level probably allows primary school teachers to help pupils' with difficulties concentrating and being autonomous, and with problems organising and planning their work for school tasks.

### • Pupils' lack of involvement in school work

Behavioural difficulties are present also, but scarcely half of those here mention attitudes which disrupt the class: disrespect, fidgeting, aggression towards other pupils, insolence, talking out of turn... In addition, we note that primary student teachers pick these difficulties out more often (25.4%) in their answers than secondary level student teachers (lower and upper secondary student teachers: 13.5%, vocational student teachers: 15.9%).

This figure which may seem to conflict with our earlier hypothesis about the advantages primary student teachers have in relation to problems with the ways pupils approach their work, must be considered in relation to the locations where teaching practice for the primary student teachers took place. It is often in areas with social problems, whereas the secondary student teachers did their practice mostly in upper secondary schools.

The other half of the answers mentioning behavioural problems describe them in terms of pupils' lack of involvement in their schoolwork, lack of interest, absenteeism, refusal to learn, loss of motivation, withdrawn pupils who have a bad self-image or even depressed pupils... This absence of involvement on the part of the pupils is often perceived as a more acute problem by secondary student teachers, who also appear to be more at a loss facing pupils who do not adhere to their "school work" (primary student teachers: 11%, secondary student teachers: 20.3%, vocational student teachers: 16.4%).

Thus the representation of the 'good pupil', which is primarily defined as being without difficulties, does not only refer to socially 'peaceful' behaviour but also to a necessary acceptance of school, to self-imposed motivation and to an ability to concentrate and be organised. In addition to these indispensable academic and behavioural skills for the expert practice of a pupil's school work, there are two other skills which appear as necessary prerequisites; the ability to abstract and a sufficient mastery of language.

This allows us to have an implicit portrait of pupils who ought to be able to plan their own learning so as to make the best of the teaching bestowed on them.

### 3.1.2 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning primary school teachers

The indicators of pupil difficulties selected by the beginning teachers relate more to the domain of learning than to that of behaviour, so confirming the finding of the questionnaire survey. But, paradoxically, if we analyse precisely the indicators given by the teachers it is on the grounds of disruptive attitudes in class (instability, restlessness, aggressiveness...) that learning difficulties are often identified. Teachers very seldom cite inhibition as an indicator of difficulties.

The approach is not the same in pre-elementary and in elementary schools:



- at elementary level, where the deadlines linked to the curricula are perceived as matters of urgency, teachers seem less ready to analyse all the parameters of a situation although these could obviously allow them to have a more global vision of the child.
- at pre-elementary school, the approach is different and teachers clearly behave paradoxically. They don't want to stigmatise children by identifying them too early nor do they want to engage in a waiting game that might in the long term transform a learning difficulty into a permanently consolidated one. Teachers of pre-elementary school are ill at ease with their position on this issue, all the more so as they deal with very young pupils (enrolled in the first year of pre-elementary school).

We also note that deficiencies and socio-cultural problems, when teachers are aware of them, create from the start an expectation of difficulties, even before these difficulties have been stated. Any deficiency or out of the ordinary situation seems to be automatically associated with learning difficulty. This expectation is an obstacle to assess pupil's real potentialities and, for teachers, to situate them in a teaching perspective which notices a possible cognitive changeability. These remarks reveal representations focused on teaching rather than on learning (i.e., difficulties are considered in terms of evaluation of school performance to the expense of an analysis of learning processes).

### **3.1.3 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning secondary level teachers**

We must first state that the criteria of difficulty selected by secondary school teachers during this follow up period do not directly refer to learning difficulties. We can distinguish elements linked to pupil's talk in class, others which are closely related to cultural references and to some representations of knowledge and of school, and finally those which are identified as attitudes not conforming to the pupil's expected role which are expressed in terms of relation either with the teacher, the school or knowledge. Although these elements do not strictly refer to pupils' learning difficulties, some emerging data nevertheless involves learning processes. This is the case when the following situations are mentioned: "school success experienced as degrading within the class", "a child who disrupts class but follows and participates" or "good school marks along with steady questioning". When the teacher notices that a child does learn although his attitudes in class are deemed not conforming, he takes away whatever value the child apparently attributes to his own success.

Pupils' talk is mentioned several times and when it is spontaneous talk, it is always qualified as 'disruptive', 'challenging',

‘special’, ‘provocative’, ‘excessive’, ‘invading and without any link with learning activities’. So it is synonymous with opposition, either to the institutional frame or to the teachers themselves or to knowledge. In the end it appears that any autonomous pupil’s speech is perceived as an attempt to take over.

Other elements put forward are unexpected cultural references from pupils. A teacher for instance admits that he was taken aback by confusion between “Hitler and Charlie Chaplin” and finds himself unable to analyse it and react appropriately.

Lastly we have put together all the indices revealing non-conforming pupils’ attitudes according to the teachers:

- behaviour in relation to the representation of the pupil’s role. Some behaviours are experienced as purposefully challenging the teacher, or knowledge, either by ‘refusing to adopt a positive attitude towards school’, ‘voluntarily interrupting a lesson’, ‘not doing homework’, ‘not learning lessons’, or on the contrary by ‘lacking motivation’, ‘refusing to participate’ or ‘withdrawing’ on the part of the girls. Some remarks explicitly indicate that the teacher is helpless to deal with situations in which a pupil shows a paradoxical behaviour, meaning that he ‘disrupts class and yet follows and participates.’
- behaviours linked to pupil’s relation to knowledge. The indices selected show either a global and confused approach - ‘experience school failure’, or an association with behaviours - ‘unsatisfactory marks and bad behaviour’, or ‘disinterest’—‘less attention paid to spelling’. Beyond these varied factual statements, which indeed act as a screen, the central issue of pupil’s relation to knowledge is never dealt with directly.
- attitudes exhibiting pupils’ behaviours which do not conform to social expectations nor to school rules such as for example: ‘difficulties accepting a certain level of punishment’, ‘homework not done and lessons not learnt’, or an unmanageable pupil ‘who is passive at some times and violent at other times’. The problem pupils are pupils who ‘cannot look back on their acts’, ‘who claim their differences’, ‘their need to differ’ or who encounter ‘difficulties to accept their place as pupils’. These children initiate a power game experienced by teachers as a challenge to any kind of authority.

In the end it follows from all these statements that pupils are considered disruptive each time they aim at asserting themselves as ‘individuals’. The relation between pupil and teacher is perceived as ‘ambivalent’. The teacher perceives this ambivalence as a difficulty for which the pupil is entirely responsible.

The teachers’ observations referring to pupils’ acts are never entirely made objective, nor linked to a context, nor seen from

a distance but always evoked through the teacher's own feelings. What this finding demonstrates is the image of a 'generic pupil' who is not allowed to be an individual. The relation to pupils which seems to be expected by teachers corresponds exactly to what J. Lévine describes as a "relation massifiée" to the pupil<sup>5</sup>.

### **3.2 · Ways teachers identify difficulties**

#### **3.2.1 · Questionnaire data collected from student teachers at the end of pre-service education**

What is striking at first sight is that 16.5% of secondary student teachers and 17.1% of primary student teachers do not answer the following question: "Can you give at least one example which shows how you have identified and analysed a difficulty and what solutions you have proposed?". When they do answer, there are still 13.3% of secondary student teachers and 40.1% of primary student teachers unable to indicate how they identify difficulties. In contrast most of the vocational student teachers answer this question and give precise criteria.

#### **3.2.2 · Empirical individual identification of difficulties**

For those who give precise criteria (secondary student teachers: 70%, vocational student teachers: 92%, primary student teachers: 42.8%), whatever level they teach in, they mostly use direct observations, with no specific test or assessment instrument (secondary student teachers: 78%, vocational student teachers: 89%, primary student teachers: 62%). Student teachers rely mainly on observation of pupils' behaviour and attitudes as well as on an empirical assessment of their school attainments. Only primary student teachers seem to take into account pieces of information collected outside the class, mainly from their colleagues. Secondary student teachers, in academic and vocational schools, never cite sources from outside their class.

We found that information given by pupils or their families when they encounter difficulties is only very seldom mentioned (between 1% and 2% of the answers). If the Education Act<sup>6</sup> states first that the 'pupil is at the centre of the school system' and then defines pupils' parents as 'full members of the school community', the real association (for a school) of pupils and their families remains very rare, at least regarding the assessing of learning difficulties.

#### **3.2.3 · Lack of a 'culture of assessment'**

Only a small proportion of student teachers use tests to identify more precisely the difficulties encountered by pupils (secondary student teachers: 19.6%, vocational student teachers: 8.5%, primary student teachers: 16.9%). These tests, when they are mentioned, consist mainly of final tests specific to each teacher. Not a single student teacher, whether from primary or secondary level,

referred to national key stage assessments<sup>7</sup>. If young teachers are generally made aware of difficulties their pupils might have, and if they perceive the uneasiness of some pupils with learning, their observations remain strictly personal and empirical.

The act of learning remains difficult to understand and the fact that teachers do not use any analysis tools or do not call for resource teachers doesn't allow them to build a shared usable framework for diagnostic assessment to analyse difficulties encountered by their pupils. Likewise, no teacher refers to observation criteria, nor to a series of indices to anticipate difficulties that pupils might encounter later and so to integrate a preventive approach.

### **3.3 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning primary school teachers**

The data collected reinforce the statements mentioned above. Identifying difficulties relies only very rarely on specific tools, it is most often done through direct casual observations focused on behavioural attitudes and school attainments. When assessments are carried out they are linked to the class and present no references to national key stage assessments. Besides they are more centred on the average attainments of the group than on the analysis of pupils' special educational needs.

#### **3.3.1 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning secondary school teachers**

Indices of difficulties are selected empirically during the ordinary everyday work of the class. The teachers use no assessment tool and do not appeal to any specific approach. We believe it is tremendously difficult for these young teachers to think about their practice from a distance and to situate their observations in an institutional, psychological or educational frame of reference. The indices selected testify to the exclusively subjective approach of the teacher. What is in fact identified is much more the difficulty they encounter in their relation to pupils than the pupil's difficulty itself. Facing some situations relating more to the assessment of behaviours and attitudes, teachers mention as an assessment tool a "personal tolerance degree" which they link to "necessary self-control". What teachers describe most are the unexpected pupils' attitudes they interpret as a challenge to their own rights as teachers, even if the grounds for these rights are never explicitly explained to pupils.

## **4 · Analysis of pupils' special educational needs**

### **4.1 · Questionnaire data collected from student teachers at the end of pre-service education**

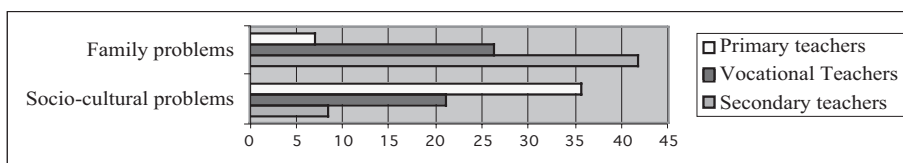
If the way to identify difficulties is empirical, such an analysis of pupils' special educational needs is almost absent. The

great majority of student teachers surveyed give no explanation as to the difficulties identified (secondary student teachers: 63.3%, vocational student teachers: 74.7%, primary student teachers: 42.1%).

#### 4.1.1 · Call for explanations outside the school or inherent to pupil

A majority of student teachers cannot analyse the nature of pupils' difficulties and seem particularly powerless in dealing with pupils' problems in relation to the learning processes. Thus it is not surprising that the majority of teachers attribute the origin of the problems they encounter to elements external to school.

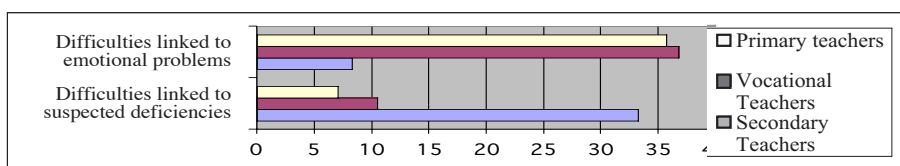
Table 2: Causes external to school



*Here 7.1% of the elements mentioned by primary student teachers evoke difficulty linked to the family environment*

These findings are mostly identical to those of the preceding study<sup>8</sup> which showed that almost 44% of primary student teachers considered that causes of school difficulties “are not the result of the pupil-school relation but are attributable to economic and social realities over which teachers have little influence”.<sup>9</sup> The second element of explanation suggested by teachers points to the pupils themselves and mentions emotional problems or suspected deficiencies.

Table 3: Causes inherent to pupils



*Here 35.1% of the elements cited by primary student teachers evoke difficulties related to emotional problems*

In these results, the fact that secondary student teachers mention deficiency more often in comparison to primary student teachers and vocational student teachers who cite emotional problems more often is rather puzzling, especially since there is a low rate of integration of children with difficulties in secondary schools (most particularly in upper secondary level). So we wonder what kind of criteria these teachers are using to come to such a conclusion.

Generally speaking, we notice that identification, as well as analysis of difficulties, relies on empirical observations. Beginning teachers seem absolutely powerless and isolated, especially in the secondary level (though the numbers of answers are very small), concerning the ability to identify the origin of difficulties and analyse their nature. They are deprived of or do not use appropriate assessment tools and do not adopt a constructive analytical approach of pupils' special educational needs.

Closely related to this is the fact that when they try to analyse difficulty, these teachers very often use indices external to the school institution to explain learning difficulties encountered by their pupils. The prevailing thought, dating back to the 70s', about the appearance of the concept of "school failure" has still apparently a strong influence on teachers' professional imaginations, including teachers at the beginning of their professional careers. Consequently explanations related to 'social and cultural disability', and on emotional problems still prevail, whereas teaching or schooling conditions, either educational or institutional, are never mentioned.

#### **4.2 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning primary school teachers**

According to the primary school teachers surveyed, difficulty can never be made objective nor analysed, and their approaches are regularly subjective and imprecise. This explains the inaccuracy of the descriptions and the quasi-impossibility for teachers to establish a taxonomy of identifiable needs. Just as in the case of the pre-service student teachers, we find that in-service teachers see the child as bringing difficulties to school that are due to features external to it - even when they see the consequences in class. So immigrant parents, a poorly stimulating social background, or a rural environment are perceived as factors contributing to early language difficulties.... Sticking to such ways of thinking, teachers avoid identifying processes centred on pupil's specific needs while adopting a mechanical and predictive attitude ending up in the teachers' own disengagement.

When there is a difficulty usually teachers notice its presence but give up analysing the needs implied. Besides, focusing on the immediately observable (in class) and the absence of a national frame of reference do not facilitate selecting indices that would allow anticipating difficulties and putting in place preventative strategies. The teachers have several ideas about their absence of reactions to the difficulties they observe:

- either they consider them as belonging to a field of intervention which is not within primary school teachers' competencies;
- or they identify them, consciously or unconsciously, as self-explanatory data outside their responsibility;
- or they identify pupils' special educational needs intuitively preventing efficient analysis and the elaboration of

appropriate responses.

#### **4.2.1. - Data collected from the follow up of beginning secondary school teachers**

For these teachers analysis of needs is a question of focusing on the research of probable causal links between observations and varied alleged factors. Without any assessment tool linked to a precise framework, analysis is limited to the teachers' perceptions.

Thus, supporting the findings of the questionnaire survey of pre-service teachers, analyses of pupil difficulties, when they exist, either refers to explanations concerning factors external to school, or pupil factors. Firstly, family problems are mentioned, and 'a particular urban culture' showing a picture of masculinity not favouring school success. Secondly, explanations referring to personal dimensions of pupils:

- when teachers identify causes of dysfunction, they give the status of subject to the pupil in this context, making the pupil responsible for a relationship that teachers deem provocative and then the phrase 'psychological weakness' turns the pupil into 'a prisoner of his feelings';
- when causes take into account pupils' relations to knowledge, this is not analysed or judged, but described using attitudes showing deficiency..., e.g., this pupil 'is bored in class' and 'waits for punishment'.
- when teachers indicate they perceive pupils' attitudes as having little validity within the school framework, or teachers say pupils 'demand the application of rules but find them unjustifiable for themselves', or teachers say 'pupils reluctantly accept what they do'.

Besides, analysis often indirectly demonstrates a representation of pupils' roles expressed by citing their faults:

- 'lack of planning', 'refusal to make an effort', 'disappointing use of language' are analyses that designate the subject as responsible for his or her failure.
- Some elements, positive in themselves for the pupil, can enhance a negative opinion when behaviour does not conform to expectations; so pupils are judged as 'intelligent but marginalised', and 'try to be expelled'.

The demand for conformity can even be expressed paradoxically when girls are reproached for 'listening but not participating' simultaneously with having 'model school behaviour'.

Generally, these ways of identifying and analysing need remain empirical. More specifically they do not take into account the developmental processes of teenagers, the construction of their identity and their relation to law. Teachers too often want adolescents to comply without explaining how. So teachers refuse to consider the learner as being engaged in a developmental process leading to



citizenship. Besides, the pupil's role model that teachers refer to remains implicit and hidden. This hidden role then becomes an obstacle to approaching and helping pupils with special educational needs.

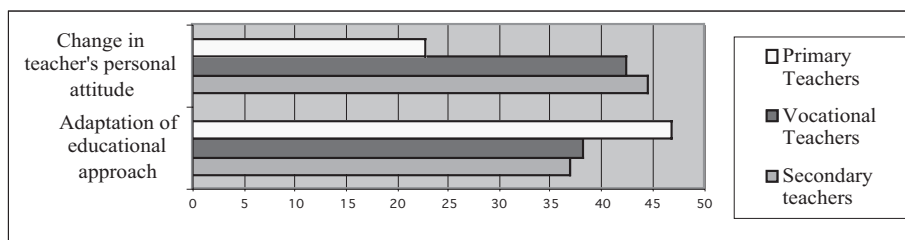
## 5 · Teachers' solutions to answer pupils' needs

### 5.1 · Questionnaire data collected from student teachers at the end of pre-service education

The response rate for secondary student teachers' is superior to that of primary student teachers, 30.3% of the former offering no solution (against 10% of primary student teachers and 5.3% of vocational student teachers). Such a difference is hard to interpret solely on the basis of the questionnaires. Probably the statement should also be linked to the different conditions of teaching practice in schools during pre-service education. Solutions suggested by teachers concern on the one hand answers they can bring themselves to their class and on the other hand external support available to them.

#### 5.1.1 · Answers given by student teachers in their class

Table 4: Answers given by student teachers in their class



*Here 22.8% of the data given by primary student teachers indicate a change in the teacher's personal attitude*

'Adaptation of educational approach' refers to the use of individualised help (support, recycling of some curricular contents, monitoring, tutorial work, differentiated teaching...). These adaptations are more often spontaneously mentioned by primary student teachers, which might testify to an emphasis on diverse approaches to ways pupils' learn in their pre-service education. Secondary student teachers favour a change in their personal attitude towards the teenagers they are in charge of. This evolution in their educational relation to pupils is mostly described on an affective level: to listen better to them, to be more flexible or on the contrary, stricter, more rigorous... We can imagine that the relative age proximity between these young student teachers and their pupils encourages them to give more importance to interpersonal relations.

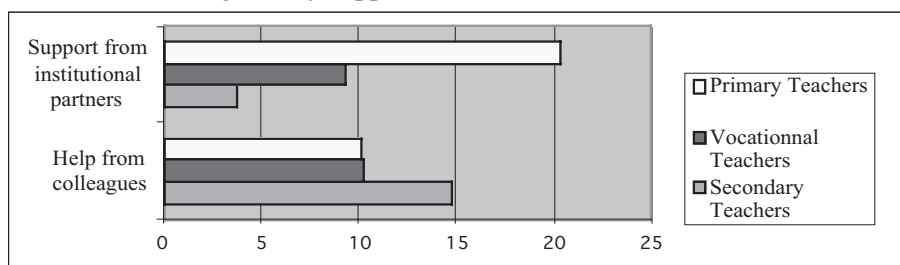


Whatever the school level, feedback based on a reflective analysis of teaching practice is barely mentioned. Once again, what are perceived as decisive are more often pupils' deficiencies or intrinsic difficulties that need to be compensated for - as opposed to the possible effects of unsuitable teaching practices that need to be rethought.

### 5.1.2 · Answers given referring to support outside the class

Primary and secondary student teachers both mention peer support, but the former are more ready to turn to other partners in the education system.

Table 5: Answers given by support outside the class



*Here 20.3% of primary student teachers' answers mention support from other institutional partners.*

To interpret these data, we have to take into account the presence of the RASED<sup>10</sup> (support services) within primary schools which provides support not available in lower and upper secondary schools.

The complete absence of partnership with families is to be noticed both from the perspective of finding solutions or analysing difficulties. Most teachers consider that too few meetings with parents can be an obstacle to school success yet at the same time they do not think about asking parents to elaborate solutions with them to problems their children are experiencing.

## 5.2 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning primary school teachers

A minority of teachers say that they do not seek solutions to respond to pupils' needs. This does not mean that they do not look for solutions but rather that what they try does not produce a satisfying response to the problem. One teacher out of two suggests a response mainly relying on implementing two approaches: educational differentiation and individualisation. The answers are rarely expressed in relation to remedial action. The actions are expressed briefly: "explain more", "ask orally"... and the suggested solutions are presented like

attempts to respond: “I have tried”, “I thought that...”. Responses are more often about stating a lack concerned with analysing needs implying a more complex approach. So they are only seldom envisaged in terms of processes or strategies: “...a child did not want to read the questions, I read them to him”. Lastly confronted by particular behavioural difficulties, teachers respond by adapting their attitude, ranging from educational contract to improving their affective relation with pupils.

Whatever the difficulty, two approaches are favoured:

- proximal help: “I try to involve him as often as possible”, “I spend five minutes with him before each task”, “I hold his hand to calm him down”...
- distal help: support from a speech therapist, or a psychologist but also, for example in pre-elementary school, family involvement in dealing with solving difficulties. This diverges with the statement made before by pre-service trainees.

When help from partners is envisaged? Teachers usually resort to help in relation to specific competencies, different from their own domain of intervention (RASED, support educators in library, speech therapist, psychologist...) without indicating precisely the kind of help brought to the pupil - for example, additional to teacher's action or if it falls within a remedial perspective.

Lack of clarity in the solutions implemented must be linked to insufficient analysis. It is indeed difficult to plan and implement a suitable response without having understood precisely the pupil's needs. Beginning teachers who are beginning their first year as “special education” teachers usually say that they lack tools and methods sufficiently precise to identify, analyse and respond appropriately to difficulties encountered by pupils.

### **5.3 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning secondary school teachers**

We must first point to what could seem a paradox. In the analysis done by the teachers, responsibilities in relation to the origin of difficulties are always attributed to causes external to the school or inherent to the pupil. This statement, however, does not prevent them from thinking that they have to look for solutions in the class. We find here again an observation already made in our previous research<sup>11</sup>. Teachers asked about causes of school failure always referred to elements external to the class and the teacher pupil educational relation, naming family, social, school institutional problems, or even the pupil himself as key to failure. However at the same time, when they were asked about possible solutions they favoured changes in their own practice in class before turning to external help.

However, concerning suggested solutions, 10 teachers (out of 23 surveyed) did not answer and when they made suggestions, their

concern in the first place is for a change in the relationship between teacher and pupil. One of the teachers mentioned, for example, the difficulty in “shifting the relation from authority to learning activities”, so expressing uneasiness about spending more time on discipline problems than on teaching. For others this means changing the relation with pupils’ tasks, for example, what a teacher tries to do when suggesting “thinking about the point of good speech mastery: what is the point of knowing its subtleties? Why express oneself correctly?” Teachers attempt here to convince pupils that “one can move mountains with words” and they also hope obtain “30% fewer spelling errors”.

For some teachers, re-motivating pupils to do the task can also be achieved by involving them in educational approaches, for instance in inviting them to participate in “preparing the assessments in class”. For others still, change in educational practice is achieved through the implementation of “cross-curricular projects” or “individual work”.

Beyond this, the concern with changing the relation between teacher and pupils is about trying to get pupils more involved, that implies “choosing materials relevant to their teenagers’ preoccupations” or allowing more “questioning and explaining”. In the end pupils have to exist, to be, for themselves; but in order to help them teachers have to organise a “close scrutiny of their work”. This new concern for the pupils’ person is expressed by asserting the need to “deal with individualities”. This means “continually bringing pupils back to their tasks, writing on the board all the elements testifying to participation in the work”. It even deals with making way to elements not directly linked to learning, when “discussion”, “listening and comforting” are accepted.

What is remarkable here is the paradox: teachers experience the appearance of the individual pupil/child in classes as a danger but it also allows a possible remedy ...

Some attitudes can be qualified as maternal identifications of the teaching role. If we refer to J. Houssaye’s educational triangle, drawn between to the three main elements in the teaching/learning process, i.e., teacher/pupil/knowledge, we find ourselves in a position where the close accompaniment of the pupil by the teacher makes him very remote, maybe too remote from knowledge, running the risk of a too close relationship. As a counterpart, some teachers suggest solutions concerning a position of resistance implying a heroic demeanour. In this latter posture, a very close or a too close relation of the teacher to his curriculum keeps the pupil away from both knowledge and from the teacher. The beginning teacher must then stick to his role, despite all obstacles, with a continual control over the pupil in order to neutralise him. The teacher has to avoid “trivialising behaviours” and “isolating a pupil in the class”. Curiously enough it is in this sole case that the need to appeal to someone else appears, by “signalling the situation to the families thanks to the “carnet de liaison”<sup>12</sup> or by implementing a follow up form to be filled in by teachers at the end of each class”.

Others appeal to punishment, deciding to give punishment after a pupil was sanctioned with “crosses” or by inflicting “hours of detention”. But these measures of punishment and isolation go along with some sense of guilt from the teachers when they mention the necessity to “avoid expelling a pupil each time, of trying to postpone punishment”.

With the experience of this ambivalence, young teachers facing the decision of punishment express an identity which one of them qualified as “hybrid”, trying in this way to describe the process of a teacher’s identification with pupils and the appearance of a collection of “adolescent echoes”. The fragile posture of these beginning teachers who are themselves at a stage of “professional adolescence”, to borrow the expression from C. Blanchart Laville and S. Nadot<sup>13</sup>, this posture finds an echo in the adolescence of the pupils they teach and in which they eventually recognise themselves, even if they refrain from accepting it<sup>14</sup>.

These attempts to find solutions to the difficulties encountered by teachers create new problems. The modification of their practice is not simple and they express their difficulty in “preparing a well-organised lesson in order to maintain achievements and face intense pleas for help” or else in regard to “enhancing both mother tongues of some pupils and French of others”. The change in the teacher/pupil relation is also a problem when it “demands listening, accepting and questioning the pupils’ attitudes, and not knowing how to deal with them”, or when this leads to “accepting double language registers” (that of/to pupil, and that of/to adolescent”...). The appearance of the pupil as a subject provoked by the end of the traditional “relation massifiée” evoked by J. Lévine and J. Moll<sup>15</sup>, lets us fear that the “pupil might act so as to take up all the teacher’s attention”. What is eventually expressed is simply the difficulty they feel about “having a normal relation with pupils”!

The choice of adopting a position of resistance, as mentioned above, is not less of a problem. Some mention “difficulties imposing themselves”, others are at a loss when “punishment has no effect”, or when isolating the disruptive pupil implies a risk of “too much self-marginalisation”.

In all cases where the classroom context itself seems endangered, it is difficult to “have respect during classes”, especially when the adopted solutions provide for “different tolerance levels for different pupils”. Some feel it would be better to set the classroom context differently, by indicating sanctions, and by “defining what cannot be tolerated in advance of situations that may occur”.

When teachers talk about “rules and law” they fear this might be experienced as repressive, and perceived like the “urban police experience”. This discourse presents a social representation of the city as a place where people experience police repression. Hence each attempt for a teacher to set rules would be associated with an image of policing. Solutions teachers imagine are constrained by the

need to avoid a “loss” of their professional self-image and the need to provide for personal development in relation to “self-control” and to “resistance to class”.

## **6 · Perception of pre-service education input in relation to needs stated**

### **6.1 · The questionnaire data collected at the end of pre-service education**

The question students were asked was: “What are the pre-service courses and approaches that provided you with expertise in this domain?”

#### **6.1.1 · A majority of student teachers deem their training insufficient to face such situations**

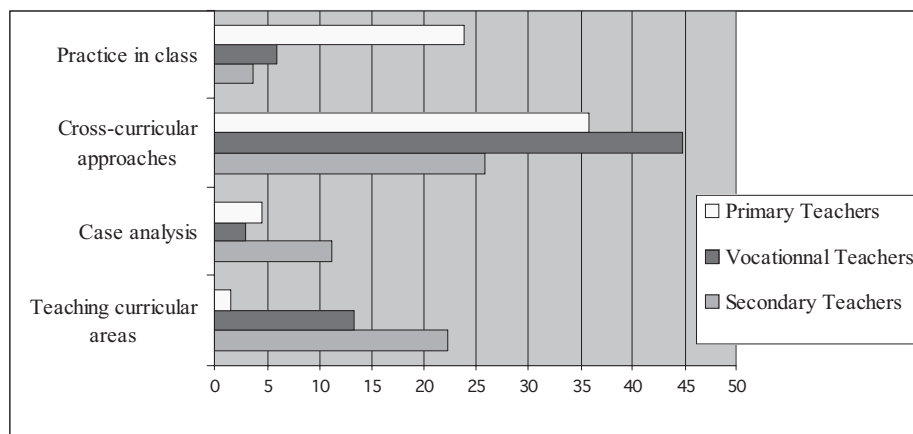
Firstly, a great number of the student teachers do not answer this question (primary student teachers: 31.6% ; secondary student teachers: 40%; vocational student teachers: 24%). To this already high number, we have to add those who say they have received no information concerning how to deal with pupils with special educational needs during their pre-service education (primary student teachers: 22.4%; secondary student teachers: 31.7%; vocational student teachers: 19%). At first sight these results are not very satisfying for the education institute; they can be interpreted as a real gap in the students’ education. They can also be analysed in terms of contents not acquired, not yet at least, but existing in the broader education programme.

#### **6.1.2 · Opportunities given by pre-service education**

However some express positive answers (primary student teachers: 46%; secondary student teachers: 28.3%; vocational student teachers: 57%). The opportunities to acquire knowledge and competencies relative to special educational needs mentioned by student teachers refer to some specific training situations.

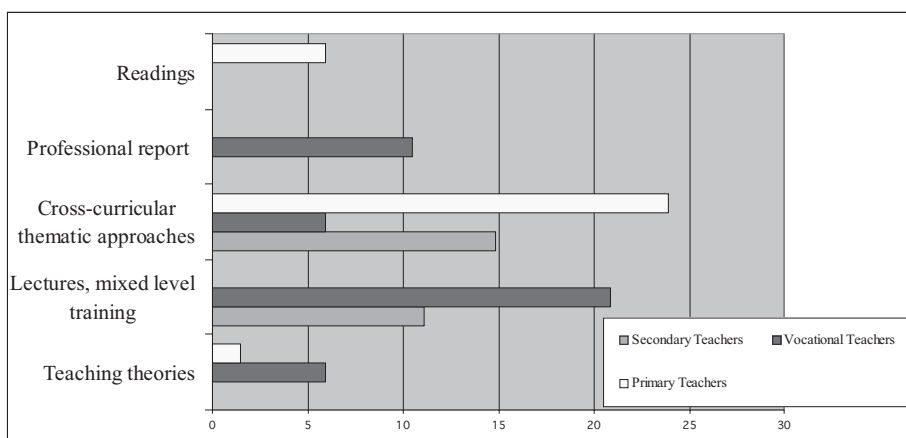
Many student teachers mention cross-curricular integrative modules as helpful. Staff with specific expertise in the questions concerned most often proposed these integrative modules. However, if primary school student teachers consider practice in schools very useful in relation to this, secondary school teachers do not share this point of view. We think that since secondary school has no tradition of providing for all types of pupils (particularly at upper secondary level), student teachers might not have met pupils with special educational needs. We can most probably assume too that they were neither able to identify them easily nor to cope with them. Only vocational school teachers use the professional report as a tool facilitating reflection on special educational needs.

Table 6: Training situations that gave opportunities to acquire competencies.



*Here 23.9% of primary student teachers' answers concern practice time in school*

Table 7: Situations in which 'integrative approaches' are tackled



*Here 6% of primary student teachers' answers refer to readings*

### 6.1.3 · The input from the different professionals of pre-service education

Primary school student teachers mention frequently the help given by professionals met during their practice, which correlates with the importance they give these practical experiences. Secondary school student teachers identify teaching staff from the education institute, their tutors, and mention exchanges with peers. Vocational

school student teachers add other professionals, encountered during their practice, to the professionals already cited by the secondary school student teachers. It seems that the reflection on the didactics of specific curricular subjects allows them to tackle these questions more easily in secondary than in primary level.

## **6.2 · Data collected from the follow up of primary school teachers**

Beginning teachers say they are not educated to respond to the specific needs of some pupils while simultaneously dealing with the rest of the heterogeneous class. They often feel powerless when confronted with a situation for which they have neither tools, nor appropriate teaching methods.

“What is to be done?”, “What is to be carried out?”, these recurring questions express a lack of operational competence mentioned by many. The issues they raise are at the same time vast and imprecise, for example “how to help a pupil to master French”, and “how to handle violence”.

Their vision on education confirms the answers given by the student teachers who are still in pre-service education. So in pre-service education integrative approaches (in particular what relates to thematic modules) have allowed student teachers to begin to identify and respond to pupils’ special educational needs. Practice in schools is also experienced as an essential moment of professional development, even if the lack of articulation between theory and practice is resented during the courses dedicated to “reflexive analysis on the practice” within the education programme.

Their comments on their education programme are expressed in these terms: “more case studies”, “more exchanges with teachers and educators in the field of special needs”, “more experience in classes with difficult pupils”. Beginning teachers have the intuition that it is through “specialised” (as they describe them) approaches that they could find an answer to their pupils’ special educational needs.

Teachers regret not having had courses on observation and evaluation methods. They also think it would be helpful to have courses about methods which allow them to make links between different curricular contents, pupils’ representations and appropriate teaching approaches. One teacher made this interesting remark: “I can see all this but I don’t know what to do”.

Hence the importance of a pre-service education facilitating effective practical experience, some rubric to identify special needs, some ways of analysing and responding to needs in an authentic learning situation, and in a framework where primary focus would not be obtaining a certificate but on the reflection and construction of a professional identity. So to think about educational adaptation for student teachers in relation to the analysis of pupils’ special educational needs is a challenge for pre-service education.

### **6.3 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning secondary school teachers**

Difficulties mentioned by secondary school teachers to answer their pupils' needs point to the problem of distancing oneself from what happens in the class. "Distancing" is inscribed in a space where teachers' expectations are never clearly expressed and pupils' actions never analysed. Yet the meeting of these expectations and the actions seem incongruous, and it seems impossible for teachers to think this over or to elaborate it. A careful analysis of this situation would be a primary condition to facilitate change and to invent adequate responses to pupils' needs.

This dilemma is built on the model of a mirrored relation between pupil and teacher's respective postures. Pupils are submitted to their pupils' roles, which are never expressed nor made explicit. It is this way of thinking which underlies the teachers' comments mentioning "necessary self-control" or the demand to show "different tolerance thresholds according to the pupils". Pupils and teachers are then in similar situations neither of them being able to refer to a framework.

A perception of references to institutional, educational or psychological frames that are too blurred, too abstract or even absent, prevents these teachers from distancing themselves from the affective sphere. It is probably because of this absence of frame of reference that vocational secondary school teachers remain particularly silent about the use of pre-service education in relation to responses to pupils' needs. The constitutive elements of this frame, if they have been given to them, have not been sufficiently integrated in a new representation of the teacher's role to enable them to deconstruct previous representations inherited from their own position as pupil. It must be said that this position, inscribed in their personal story, is not that remote from them and that it is steadily reactivated, by their mirrored postures in their relation to pupils (the analysis of their discourse allows us to say so) as well as by their current implicit situation as beginning teachers.

In this context it is a little surprising that nothing emerges concerning contents from pre-service education that might help their everyday difficulties.

## **7 · Teachers' needs for help and training**

### **7.1 · Questionnaire data collected from student teachers at the end of pre-service education**

The question the student teachers were asked was: "Have you felt needs for additional training or help? If so, explain." Firstly, some student teachers do not answer this question, or say that they do not need any additional training (primary student teachers: 39.5%; secondary student teachers: 58%; vocational student teachers: 17.4%).

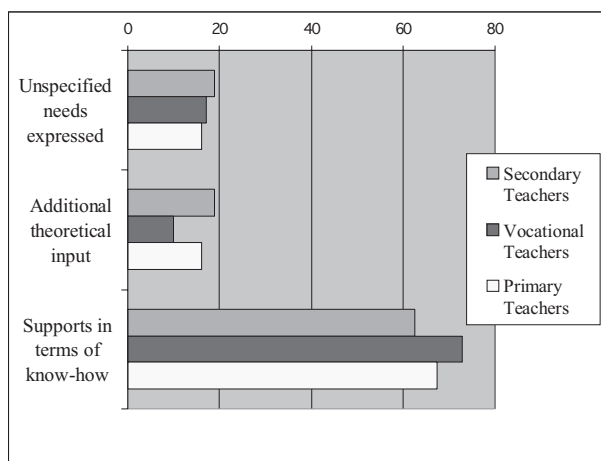


We notice a great discrepancy between secondary student teachers and vocational student teachers. It is useful to note that the practice classes of the secondary student teachers are mostly in high schools (lycées) and that consequently they meet the pupils at the heart of this study with special needs infrequently in these schools.

### 7.1.1 · Needs for education to face pupils' learning difficulties

For those who mention a need for further education, it is clear that the need is for skills.

Table 8: Types of educational needs identified by teachers.



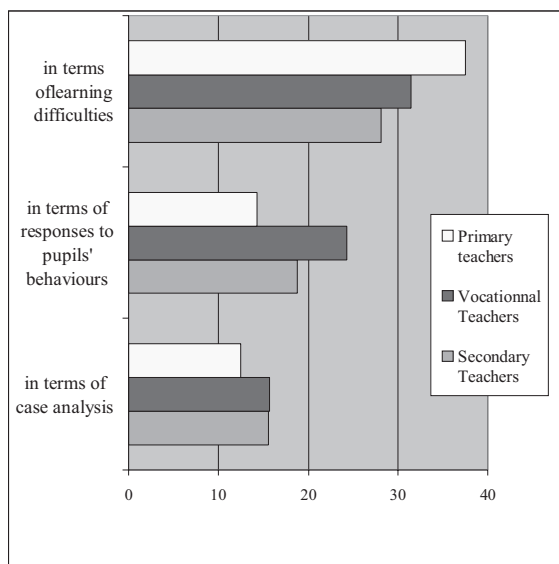
*Here 62.5% of suggestions from secondary student teachers concern needs in terms of “skills”.*

The needs expressed in terms of “skills” primarily concern pupils' learning difficulties. The ability to analyse a situation, less often mentioned, is cited spontaneously by some teachers and a more detailed analysis of their answers shows that teachers expect both help to understand their problem situations and also ready-made answers to cope on the spot with some pupils' behaviours.

Turning to help from other partners is also mentioned - but a relatively high number of student teachers cannot mention precise educational partners. This remark concerns especially secondary student teachers, especially vocational student teachers. (primary student teachers: 6.6%; secondary student teachers: 28.3%; vocational student teachers: 33.3%).

Analysis of the answers detailing the educational partners called on shows that primary student teachers want to turn mainly to experts (members of the support teams, external partners...). Whereas vocational student teachers mostly look for help from the educational team in their school, secondary student teachers seem less certain

Table 9: Nature of skills expected by teachers

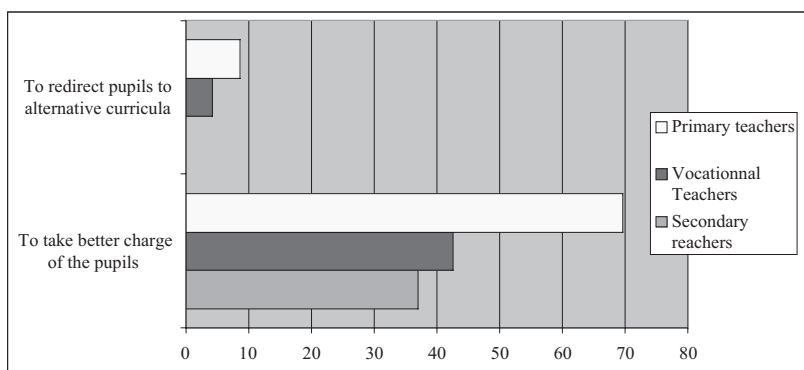


*Here 37.5% of propositions expressed by primary student teachers concern education in terms of response to learning difficulties.*

about who could be asked. We must also note that these answers are given in the absence of education in special needs for secondary school teachers<sup>16</sup>. A change has been made at the beginning of school year 2004, for a specific in-service training intended for them.

A question was asked about what these teachers wanted to ask other professionals, in particular did they want to find another

Table 10: Aims of the appeals for help



*Here 8.7% of the needs for help expressed by primary student teachers aim at sending pupils to alternative school curricula*

structure within the school to educate these pupils. The answers confirm a statement already made in a previous study<sup>17</sup> and this attitude seems even to have been reinforced; their primary preoccupation is indeed to find help to respond to the difficulties encountered and not to think about a pupil's exclusion. It is probable that the repeated institutional affirmation of the legitimacy and welcome of all pupils in ordinary structures lead them not to propose exclusion.

In regard to secondary student teachers, it is to be noted that the location for their practice, mostly in upper secondary schools, must be taken into account in analysing the results (the key stage of the end of lower secondary school already works as a filter for pupils with difficulties).

### **7.2 · Data collected from the follow up of beginning primary school teachers**

The requests for in-service education from these teachers are mainly about opportunities to share experiences and competencies, with opportunities to meet experts and/or other partners to enable them to acquire better teaching methods to answer diverse needs. In-service education should be reconsidered from this perspective, particularly to facilitate reflective analysis of practice and to providing long term follow up of teachers.

### **7.3 · Data collected from the follow up of secondary school teachers**

Real needs for education come out from the study. Firstly, we notice that teachers do not describe their needs for education spontaneously but discover them randomly with the situations they mention. So we identify a number of different thematic subjects, which lack precision: carrying out differentiated teaching, knowing the legal and institutional framework, teachers' roles and what they mean in a context of a democratising school, representations of pupils' and teachers' roles, the relation with parents, and punishment... Of course they know the expression "differentiated teaching practice" but they are not able to answer the question: "What do we differentiate and why?" even if they perceive it as a demand in their practice. They remain centred on pupils' school levels ("poor marks", "good results but..") and their attention focuses mainly on pupils' performance rather than on the analysis of cognitive processes and mental strategies which enable pupils to build meaning. So they are unable to identify pupils' needs. What is lacking is a sufficient mastery of specialised language, indispensable among peers, which makes it easier to stand back from teaching/learning situations in order to express and analyse them more objectively.

Consequently a great part of their talk consists in questioning the legitimate place of particular pupils at their school level, considering their school results and/or performances, which testifies

to their lack of knowledge of their roles as they are described in the context of democratising the school system. A link may be established with the way they are recruited. The selective examinations allowing access to the career of secondary school teachers gives central importance to curricular knowledge. These teachers are the product of an elitist selection system, which emphasises curricular knowledge as the most important element of their image and encourages them to think of themselves as responsible for this elitism. Any other approach is perceived as renouncing their curricular object. So they are only prepared in a small way to understand pupils' disinterest or possible difficulties. Working on the meaning of democratisation, on the aims and repercussions of the teacher's role, enabled some of them to work positively on reflection on an analysis of practices.

The question of punishment is recurrent too. The extreme diversity of justifications and the ambivalent feelings it triggers reveal misunderstandings about the relations at stake between teacher and pupil and ignorance of the educational function of teachers. What emerges here is necessary questioning about teenagers' development, the construction of identity and the relation to the law.

Finally, partnership with families is seldom mentioned and often reduced to the expectation that parents' will accept the punishment given to pupils by teachers, or even that the parents will punish a pupil on behalf of the teacher. The few teachers who were involved in meetings with families thought about the respective roles and the nature of the relation to be built, so opening a reflection on the basis and conditions of this partnership.

## 8 • Conclusion

According to this study, beyond the uneasiness they feel towards attitudes which might disrupt the class, beginning teachers show they really attend to the learning difficulties encountered by their pupils. However this perception of the difficulty results mostly in empirical and inappropriate responses that do not resolve it. This statement must be related to their stereotyped representation of what a pupil should be and to their apparent lack of knowledge of what is involved in the act of learning. Thus, they cannot estimate properly their role in the construction of learning processes of all the pupils in their charge and cannot clearly express the nature of their needs in terms of help and training. Consequently the feeling of powerlessness often prevails.

If the teachers' role, as is constantly reasserted, is indeed to allow each pupil without exception to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to become a responsible and active citizen, the results of this study invite us to rethink teachers' education.

Talks about the principles on which the school mission is based are not enough to make teachers efficient and they most often only result in teachers' guilt about their feeling of powerlessness, and

even in teachers' contesting the validity of the idea of schools open to everyone. The complexity of the work they are getting involved in assumes that they have a true knowledge of the statutory and institutional context in which they work and that they know how to situate themselves as professionals in varied contexts and situations and with different educational partners. Their education should thus allow them to acquire both the ability to take action and professional legitimacy and reassuring skills which rely on knowledge but also on technical abilities and real expertise.

Lastly, education must destabilise the previous fixed representation of the "ideal pupil" and dispute the reference to a prescriptive realm leaving little space to recognise the diversity of abilities and the needs of each pupil, considered as an individual. And yet education must also prepare teachers to facilitate the inclusion of pupils in social groups, so foreshadowing their participation in community citizenship. This constant tension between individuality and community, personal identity and shared culture, assumes that young teachers build detailed curricular and practical competencies and develop sensitivity and build intelligent relationships.

Eventually the ability to take into account special educational needs depends on the way each teacher's needs were provided for during their professional training. To acknowledge individuality in education makes teachers aware of the fact that personal experience and history also shape one's learning processes and the way one sees ones' school and ones' professional future.



# Appendix 1

## Identity and characteristics of the teachers surveyed with the questionnaire

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The student teachers came from three of the five education centres incorporated in IUFM of Versailles<sup>18</sup> and intend to teach at both primary and secondary level schools.

### • Numbers of surveyed teachers

- primary student teachers (PE): 76
- lower and upper secondary student teachers (PLC): 60
- vocational student teachers – domains of technical professionals for services (PLP): 75

Particular attention was paid to including secondary student teachers since they now have to provide for pupils with special educational needs<sup>19</sup>.

### • Young adults

The primary and secondary student teachers are 27 years old on average, the vocational student teachers are older: 31.5 years old. This is representative of the reference populations and the age difference of the vocational student teachers is due frequently to this group having had earlier careers in the professional world.

• **A high rate of feminisation**

Primary student teachers: 88.2% (national rate: 78.9%)

Secondary student teachers: 83.3% (national rate: 63%)

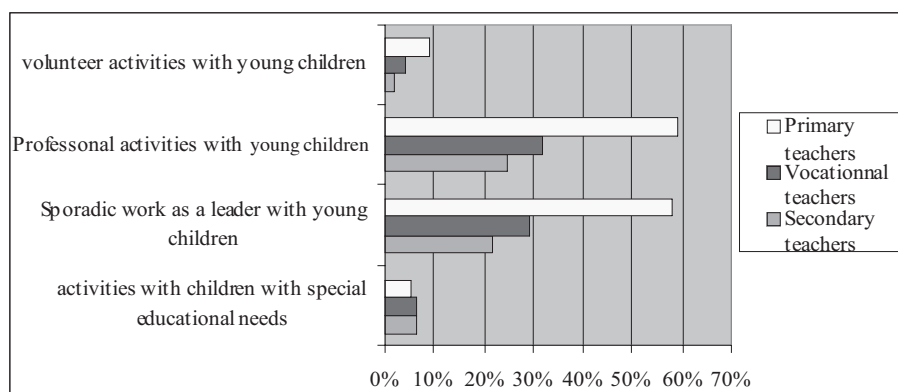
Vocational student teachers: 64% (national rate varies greatly according to the professional domain)

Even if we consider the fact that the rate of feminisation is superior to the national average in the region of Ile de France, we find an overrepresentation of women in this sample of primary and secondary student teachers.

• **Previous working experience with young people more frequent among primary school teachers**

The answer to this question shows a contrast: 76% of primary student teachers, 65.3% of vocational student teachers and 56.7% of secondary student teachers answered affirmatively in response to this question. The nature of this experience is quite different too:

Table 11: Previous working experience with children and adolescents



*Here 9.2% of primary student teachers had previous voluntary experience with children or teenagers.*

*(The total can be superior to 100 since some teachers give more than one answer)*

A large majority of primary school teachers had such voluntary experience before entering the IUFM. We infer that their wish to work with children is a main criterion in their choice of a teaching career, this is not so obvious in the case of secondary level student teachers.

A more precise analysis of the answers shows that the opportunities offered by schools to experience initial professional



activity with children or young people (educational assistant or school monitor) were taken up by almost a quarter of the primary student teachers surveyed. This was less often the case for vocational student teachers and almost non-existent for secondary level student teachers. The data collected do not allow analysis of this next question, but it would be interesting to check numbers of young people from disadvantaged sociocultural backgrounds who were involved in this type of voluntary activity with young people in difficulty.

#### • **Contrasted practice conditions**

The location of the practice schools is not always representative of the types of schools these young teachers might be sent to at the beginning of their career. Primary student teachers have all done their practice in a primary school, and for almost 41% of them, this school was situated in an educational priority zone (ZEP). Although the Académie of Versailles has only 22% of schools listed in education priority zones, beginning teachers are very often sent to them when they get out of the IUFM. Also 80% of the secondary student teachers surveyed did their practice in an upper secondary school, not often in priority zones, and less than 20% in lower secondary schools. We know there is a real difference between their teaching practice and their future teaching posts as beginning secondary school teachers are often sent for their first school-year to lower secondary schools, mostly situated in educational priority zones. Concerning vocational student teachers, their practice locations were representative of their future posts, 96% of them being in a vocational school and 4% in an upper secondary school, 20% of these schools were located in educational priority zones or problem areas.



# Appendix 2

## Categories established after analysis of the contents of the questionnaires

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<b>QUESTION N°1</b>	
In your work, have you met pupils who have particular difficulties? What were they?	
0.	No response to the question
1.	Indicators of difficulty mentioned by the teachers
1.0	No indicators of difficulty
1.1.	Behavioural difficulties
1.1.1	Disturbing the class (aggression, physical violence, verbal violence, being agitated)
1.1.2	That do not disturb the class (being absent, being late, passive, closed in on himself or herself.)
1.1.3	Difficulty in involvement, making an effort (work not done, unmotivated)
1.2	Learning difficulties
1.2.0	School failure without analysis
1.2.1	Language mastery
1.2.2	Comprehension, abstraction
1.2.3	Mastery of curriculum areas
1.2.4	Relation to work (lack of autonomy, concentration difficulty, organisation.....)

<p><b>2      Details of explanations given</b></p> <p>2.0      No explanations</p> <p>2.1      Problems related to the developmental processes of the child or adolescent</p> <p>2.2      Emotional problems</p> <p>2.3      Deficiencies</p> <p>2.3.1    cognitive problems (so language problems)</p> <p>2.3.2    sensory problems</p> <p>2.3.3    motor problems</p> <p>2.3.4    sickness, health problems</p> <p>2.4.      Socio-cultural problems</p> <p>2.5      Other problems extrinsic to the child</p> <p>2.5.1    Disengaging from the family, voluntary or not, (because of death, separation, absence...)</p> <p>2.5.2    Paid activity of the young person, parallel to school attendance</p>	<p><b>QUESTION N° 2</b></p> <p>Can you give us at least one example which shows how you have identified and analysed the difficulty and what solutions you have proposed?</p>
<p>0      Absence of response to the question</p>	
<p>1      Way of identifying the difficulty</p> <p>1.1      Not answered</p> <p>1.2      From direct observation, without a specific analysis tool</p> <p>1.2.1    Observation of behaviour and attitudes</p> <p>1.2.2    Direct observation of the child's "level" of performance</p> <p>1.3      From information accessed outside class</p> <p>1.3.1    The pupil's file</p> <p>1.3.2    Information from another person in the school</p> <p>1.3.3    Information from another person outside the school</p> <p>1.3.4    Information from the pupil's parents</p> <p>1.3.5    Information from the pupil concerned</p> <p>1.4      From evaluations made by the teacher</p> <p>1.4.1    National evaluations</p> <p>1.4.2    School evaluations</p> <p>1.4.3    Evaluations made by the teacher</p>	
<p><b>2. Analysis of the pupil's difficulty</b></p> <p>Taking categories from question n°1</p>	

<p><b>3      The solutions proposed by the teacher</b></p> <p>3.1    None</p> <p>3.2    Educational process</p> <p>3.2.1   Analysis of practices</p> <p>3.2.2   Organisation of individual help, tutoring, individualised teaching....</p> <p>3.3    Change in personal attitude of the teacher (being more firm, more attentive, being closer....)</p> <p>3.4    Help from colleagues in the school</p> <p>3.5    Help from resources in or out of the school</p> <p>3.5.1   With the aim of keeping the pupil in the class</p> <p>3.5.2   With a view to removing the child from the class</p>	<p><b>QUESTION N°3</b></p> <p>In this occasion, did you feel you needed more in-service or help? If so, what sorts?</p>
<p>0      Absence of a reply to the question</p>	<p>1      Needs beyond pre-service education</p> <p>1.0    None</p> <p>1.1    Unspecified needs expressed</p> <p>1.2    Additional theoretical work (Psychology, Social sciences ...)</p> <p>1.3    Support in terms of “know-how”</p> <p>1.3.1   Know how to analyse situations.</p> <p>1.3.2   Know how in terms of how to respond to pupils’ attitudes</p> <p>1.3.3   Know how in terms of responding to learning difficulties (teaching strategies)</p>
<p><b>2      Requests for help</b></p> <p>2.0    None</p> <p>2.1    Unspecified needs expressed</p> <p>2.2    To take better change of the pupils</p> <p>2.2.1   From point of view of the school’s teaching and learning team’</p> <p>2.2.2   From the point of view of educational advisors</p> <p>2.2.3   From the point of view of professionals outside the classroom (psychologist, social worker, health service....)</p> <p>2.3    To point the children in other directions</p> <p>2.3.1   Knowledge about counselling procedures</p> <p>2.3.2   Knowledge about special schools</p>	

<b>QUESTIONS N°4</b>	
What are the pre-service courses that provided you with expertise in this domain?	
0	Absence of a reply to the question
1	Support in terms of contents and processes learned during pre-service
1.0	None
1.1	Pre-service education: A course about teaching curriculum
1.2	Pre-service education: Understanding arising through analysis of teaching practice
1.3	Pre-service education: A course about different teaching learning approaches
1.3.1	In general education
1.3.2	Theoretical courses or conferences ...
1.3.3	Cross disciplinary thematic modules
1.3.4	In the course of writing a thesis
1.3.5	Reading professional books
1.4	Pre-service education: During work in school
1.5	In-service education
<b>2</b>	<b>Support in terms of specific help</b>
2.0	None
2.1	Discussions with teacher education staff (In France formateurs)
2.1.1	Discussions with an educational advisors (in France un conseiller pédagogique, un IMF...)
2.1.2	Discussions with a teacher educator (in France un tuteur de l'IUFM)
2.2	Discussions with other professionals
2.2.1	Discussions with other teachers
2.2.2	Discussions with people working in the school you were doing your teaching practice
2.2.3	Discussions with other people
<b>3</b>	<b>Outside support</b>
3.1	Experiences outside of teaching
3.2	A professional activity before teaching
3.3	An earlier career

## Footnotes

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- 1 C.Rault, S.Molina, H.Gash, *Difficultés d'apprentissage: Quels types d'aide?* L'Harmattan, 2001.
- 2 En Europe et ailleurs, les enseignants débutants face aux besoins Éducatifs particuliers de leurs élèves in revue RELIANCE n° 16, Editions Erès, 2005.
- 3 The analysis of the teachers' characteristics will be found in Appendix 1.
- 4 The criteria are presented in Appendix 2.
- 5 Lévine J., Moll J., 2001, *Je est un autre*, Paris, Editions ESF. By this expression, the authors indicate a relation between teacher and pupil that never allows the pupil to exist as an individual. (Editor: this is akin to "Mass" in "Mass Media", but I think it best to allow the reader to discern the meaning.).
- 6 Loi d'orientation sur l'Éducation du 10 juillet 1989.
- 7 Since September 1989, national assessments are carried out in key stages CE2 (3<sup>rd</sup> year of elementary school) and 6<sup>ème</sup> (first year of secondary level), it has now been extended to 5<sup>ème</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> year of lower secondary school) and 2<sup>nde</sup> (first year of upper secondary school). This assessment was implemented to help teachers assess their pupils by identifying their individual attainments and weaknesses. This operation also enables the establishment of national norms. Based on the findings of these tests, additional documents are published to help teachers analyse their pupils' errors and offer remedial approaches.
- 8 C.Rault, S.Molina, H.Gash, *Difficultés d'apprentissage: Quels types d'aide?* L'Harmattan, 2001.
- 9 Ibid page 278.
- 10 The support services for pupils in difficulty, created in 1990, are composed of teachers specialised in educational support, psychotherapists and educational

psychologists. Every primary school should be entitled to resort to the intervention of the RASED.

11 *Id.*, note 2.

12 In French secondary schools, this “carnet de liaison” (Editor: English might be “liaison notebook”) is a very common document in the home-school liaison relationship. It is given to each pupil and allows the school to communicate with the family, or the family to ask for an appointment with the teachers.

13 Blanchard Laville C., Nadot S., 2001, *Malaise in teachers’ education*, Paris, Editions L’Harmattan, Collection Savoir et formation.

14 Denial is by definition ignorance of what is frightful.

15 Lévine J., Moll J., 2001, *Je est un autre*, Paris, ESF éditeur. See footnote 6: the “relation massifiée” is one in which the pupil is not allowed to exist as an individual.

16 C.Rault, *Donner aux enseignants du second degré l’accès à des formations spécialisées: une nécessité*, Cahiers de l’Education n° 27, Editions Berger-Levrault, 2003.

17 C.Rault, S.Molina, H.Gash, *Difficultés d’apprentissage: Quels types d’aide?* L’Harmattan, 2001, p181 à 185.

18 Centres located in Antony, Jouhaux, Anton, Val de Bièvre and Saint Germain en Laye.

19 Circulaire n° 2002-111 dated April 30, 2002, *Adaptation et intégration scolaires: des ressources au service d’une scolarité réussie pour tous les élèves. (School adaptation and integration: resources to support successful schooling for all pupils.)*.



# Teacher education students’ and first year in-service teachers’ perceptions about their initial education in relation to the special educational needs of Spanish pupils<sup>20</sup>

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## **1 • Introduction**

The data and information contained in this report are a synthesis of the results found in two previous studies (Molina y Salvador, 2003; Molina, Arranz y Vived, 2005). In both studies a closed questionnaire was administered to a students’ population sample in the last year of their teacher education and to teachers with just one year of professional experience.

Although the content in both questionnaires was rather ample, in this report I am going to focus my attention on the results relating to three areas, as in both questionnaires there were three questions referring to: (1) types of pupils with special educational needs in ordinary classrooms, (2) perceptions about the initial education received to satisfy the educational needs of these pupils, and (3) solutions that the surveyed students and beginning teachers propose in order to improve the pupils’ education.

Before specifying the characteristics of the methodological

design used, I think it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the institutional character of initial teacher education in Spain. In this country the students who decide to do teacher education may choose one of seven specialities from the beginning of their university studies: pre-school education, primary education, special education, problems related to listening and language, physical education, musical education and foreign languages. In the seven specialities there exist both common subjects and subjects specific for each speciality.

Concerning studies in secondary education, students have to study a degree in a university faculty (philology, humanities, sciences, etc.) and afterwards they take a postgraduate course on psycho-pedagogy<sup>21</sup> of about 150 hours. This postgraduate course enables them to take part in the public national examinations, so that they can work in secondary education centres.

Once primary and secondary teachers have passed their corresponding selective public examination, there is a compulsory 'practice teaching year'. If, after this year, they do not receive a positive evaluation, they must prepare a new public examination, to become civil servants (those teachers working in private schools are not asked to do this practice teaching year, as they do not have to pass any kind of selective public exam). However, the monitoring and evaluation of the practice teaching year is passed usually by everybody, since a rigorous plan of monitoring does not exist, nor it is clear who is in charge of this monitoring and what is the status of the advice. In any case it is necessary to know that Spanish law at present does not allow university centres in charge of initial education to take part in the monitoring and evaluation of beginning teachers.

Obviously, this institutional configuration has to be modified in a near future according to the common exigencies in the Bologna agreement for higher education.

## **2 · Methodological Design**

### **2.1 · Population Sample**

#### **A) Students in the last year of their university studies.**

There were 123 students, male and female, in the Science Faculty from the University of Granada, who were studying the specialities of pre-school education and primary education.

#### **B) Beginning Teachers.**

There were 28 teachers, male and female, who were working in public primary schools in the provinces of Huesca and Zaragoza and finishing their first year of professional experience.

None of the individuals surveyed had studied special education. However, this group who participated in the

‘Comenius Programme’ accepted without hesitation the idea that the education of pupils with special educational needs in ordinary schools should be the responsibility of the ordinary teachers, and believed that the pedagogical, psychological and rehabilitation programmes would be the responsibility of the specialised teachers of these pupils with special educational needs outside the ordinary classrooms.

## **2.2 · Tools for the data collection**

A questionnaire with closed questions was administered to both groups. In the case of the final year students in the teacher education faculties, the questionnaire was administered as a classroom activity during the month after the compulsory teaching practice in ordinary schools under current Spanish law. In the case of the beginning teachers, the questionnaire was sent by post, asking the teachers to send them back, completed, to the Faculty of Education in the University of Zaragoza. (30 questionnaires were sent and 28 teachers answered them).

## **2.3 · Data Analysis**

Due to the fact that the first stage of the ‘Comenius Programme’, to which this study belongs, was simply a descriptive research exercise, no complex statistical analysis was considered appropriate. This is the reason why only percentages of the answers given have been taken into account.

# **3 · Results**

For a correct interpretation of the results two details have to be taken into consideration: a) that the percentages have not been calculated as a function of the number of people who answered the questionnaire, but as a function of the number who responded to each question; and b) that each person could respond to more than one option in each question. For this reason, in the questions where the surveyed population responded to more than one option, the total number of the results in the first column is superior to the number of the sample population (this is the case for the teachers). On the other hand, in those questions where some surveyed individuals did not answer and, also, responded to only one option (this is the case for the students), the number of results in the first column is inferior to number in the population sample.

### 3.1 · Students in the last year of Teacher Education Studies

#### 3.1.1 · Types of students with special educational needs who have been found in the ordinary classrooms

Table N° 1: Types of difficulties found in children

TYPE OF DIFFICULTIES	N	%
1. Mentally Retarded Children <sup>22</sup>	14	17
2. Personality Disorders	11	14
3. Social Integration Problems	21	26
4. Brain Lesions	4	5
5. School Delay	29	36
6. Sensory Handicap	2	2

*N.B. : 42 students did not answer this question.*

#### 3.1.2 · Level of satisfaction with initial education given in order to be able to satisfy the special educational needs of the pupils

All the surveyed students answered that they are not satisfied with the initial education given, as it does not enable them to know what they have to do with the pupils who have special educational needs.

#### 3.1.3 · Proposed solutions to improve overall teacher education or education related to special educational needs of pupils

Table N° 2: Type of Teacher Education required

TYPE	N	%
1. The study of any specific subject	21	20
2. Suitable Subjects to the practical needs	12	11
3. More practical information	64	59
4. More general information	11	10

*N.B.: 15 students did not answer this question in Table 2.*

### 3.2 · Beginning teachers

#### 3.2.1 · Type of pupils with special educational needs which have been found in ordinary classrooms

Table N° 3: Types of difficulties found in the children

TYPE OF DIFFICULTIES	N	%
Aggressiveness	10	6
Physical Violence	8	4
Verbal Violence	6	3
Hyperactivity	14	8
Frequent Absenteeism	8	4
Passivity	10	6
Poor grasp of language (e.g., migrants)	26	14
Oral Language Problems	13	7
Written Language Learning Problems	18	10
Mathematics Learning Problems	10	6
Emotional Problems	10	6
Sensorial Shortcomings	8	4
Psychomotor Shortcomings	10	6
Cognitive and/or Mental Shortcomings	15	8
Sociocultural Deficits	10	6
Other Type of Problems	4	2

#### 3.2.2 · Level of satisfaction concerning initial education being able to prepare teachers to meet pupils' special educational needs

As in the case of the students in the last year of teacher education studies, all the surveyed beginning teachers have said that they are not satisfied with that education, since it does not enable them to know what to do with pupils experiencing special educational needs.

### 3.2.3· Proposed solutions to improve education related to pupils' special educational needs

Table N° 4: Type of Education Required

Type of Education Required	N	%
More Theoretical Information	4	4
Observation Techniques	2	2
Diagnosis Techniques	10	11
Curricular Adaptation	10	11
Classroom Organization	18	19
Group Dynamics and/or conduct modification	14	15
Rehabilitation Techniques	14	15
Orientation Procedures	10	11
Community Support Services	2	2
More information and help of Psycho-Pedagogical Support	4	4
Other type of Information	6	6

## 4· Discussion

With regard to the first question it is difficult to make a comparison between both groups due to the fact that in the students' questionnaire the category 'Other Problems' did not exist, but in the teachers' questionnaire it did exist. Also it is impossible to know what type of problems the teachers included in this category. That is also why the percentages in the categories analysed are lower among the teachers than among the students.

A difference between students and teachers can be shown, if the answers given to this question are gathered in three groups (social integration problems, handicaps, retarded school children). According to students (see Table 1), a greater number of problems found in their pupils refer to disability or handicap (38%: mentally retarded children, personality disorders, brain lesions, and sensory handicaps). Next most important are retarded children (36%: school delay), and those with social integration problems (26%) are in last place. However, the teachers (see Table 3) quote retarded school children in the first place (41%: frequent absenteeism, poor grasp of language, oral language problems, written language problems and mathematics problems), disability or handicap in the second place (24%: emotional problems, sensorial shortcomings, psychomotor

shortcomings and cognitive shortcomings) and social integration problems in the third place (21%: aggressiveness, physical violence, verbal violence and hyperactivity).

Regardless of these slight differences between students and teachers, and according to these data, all the teachers should be ready to solve problems in the academic learning of the pupils who do not suffer from any incapacitating problem concerning their social integration. If we take into account that approximately a third of the students registered in ordinary classrooms experience school failure, in spite of not suffering any disability, then it seems logical to take it for granted that it is impossible that the educational needs of those children be treated by specialised teachers in special classrooms. If this were the case, then the number of specialised teachers in ordinary schools would have to be superior to the number of general teachers (as specialised teachers work with groups of very small numbers of children).

As far as the type of pupils being really disabled is concerned, it can be proven that although there is a great discrepancy between the percentages given by students and by teachers (38% and 24% respectively)<sup>23</sup>, the number is equally important. For this reason, the educational needs of all the teachers should be focused on how to design the appropriate curricular adaptations for such students, leaving for specialised teachers specific programmes that each student requires (e.g., language therapy, psychomotor functioning, reasoning, and social abilities).

The group of pupils with social integration problems is more difficult to delimit, since boys with bad behaviour problems, and some who belong to different cultures or ethnic groups from the hegemonic can be included in the same group. For this reason, it is more difficult to specify what all teachers' educational needs would be. Nevertheless, it looks evident that all teachers should be experts in the kind of therapy that it is known as 'Group Dynamics' and also, in the mastery of techniques to improve the pupils' social abilities.

The fact that all teachers and students surveyed say that they do not feel satisfied with their initial pre-service education could be interpreted as a failure of the Spanish system. However, I think that such a radical criticism can be explained by the age of the people surveyed: ninety per cent are less than 25 years old. The young, in all countries and in all times, are people who, generally do not agree with the establishment.

In the third question the difference between the percentages selected by students and by teachers related to the type of education, that in their opinion is needed, is similar to the difference mentioned in the first question. However, there exists total unanimity in the demand of greater practical education (70 and 86 per cent respectively) in comparison to the demand of greater theoretical information (30 and 14 percent respectively).

This greater demand for theoretical information by the students is explained, from my point of view, because the students do not know yet other different models of education: all their education is focused on the study of subjects in the curriculum. On the contrary, the teachers, despite the fact that they have only worked for a year, they already know, through experience, the meaning of another model based on practical action. This is clear in the answers they give to other questions in the questionnaire. I will not comment on this here, because this question is not included in the students' questionnaire (thus, it is not possible to make any comparison on the scope of the education provided in the schools).

As a summary, taking into account the types of difficulties of pupils in ordinary classrooms, the high proportions of criticisms that students and teachers make about their initial education, and the demands they make of the education required, I will now present a series of proposals which, from my point of view, will contribute to improve the preparation of teachers to meet the educational needs of disabled pupils, of pupils with school failure and of pupils with poor social integration.

## **5 · Proposals to Improve Initial Education in Relation to the Special Educational Needs of the Pupils.**

### **5.1 · Proposals referred to the Psycho-Pedagogical Education model**

#### **5.1.1 · General Considerations**

It seems clear enough that in the initial education of all teachers, topics related to special educational needs should exist, since there are pupils receiving schooling who require special educational attention in all ordinary schools, either because they are disabled or because they belong to very different cultures or ethnic groups, which prevent them from performing academically in ways that allow them to master the minimum objectives imposed by the official curriculum. Nowadays 'La Escuela Graduada', or 'Grade School' model, based on homogeneous grouping, does not have any justification, because of the real heterogeneity of the pupils in any ordinary school. This is due to the great migration movements from under-developed countries to developed ones.

I think that the great contradiction in the present school is that it is based on a theoretical discourse, which defends the value of diversity whereas its organisational model is still anchored in the homogeneous grouping of pupils derived from the school model that was imposed at the end of the XIX century 'La Escuela Graduada' or 'Grade School'. Reality shows that today the quality of the school buildings, furniture, and didactic resources are better than a hundred



years ago. Obviously, in a school model based on the value of homogeneity in pupils, those pupils with special educational needs cannot be properly helped, even when theoretical discourse defends the value of diversity.

From my point of view, the defence of 'inclusive schools' only has a philosophical justification in the Postmodern context, where, as it is known, they start from the implicit supposition that by changing the language, reality is automatically changed. The same thing happens with the defence of the 'emancipating school'. How is it possible to emancipate pupils from social inequality in a school model based in homogenous grouping of pupils and in a racist and xenophobic society?

As Stainback and Stainback state (1999:17): 'The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in ordinary schools is only the first step for the integration of these students'. For this reason, inclusion is an indispensable prerequisite for integration, but it can never be ethical to resign oneself to including these types of pupils in ordinary schools without fighting, in a parallel way, to change the model of 'La Escuela Graduada' or 'Grade School' and to make societies more egalitarian and democratic.

This overview I have just presented is intended to show that in initial teacher education, subjects related to the educational needs of pupils must exist, not only from the point of view of their development and the difficulties relating to their educational and social adaptation, but also from the point of view of the didactic and organisational models that are appropriate to satisfy their real needs in ordinary schools. However, if these education needs were met only by reading an appropriate bibliography, attending university lectures, and passing theoretical exams, then the shortcomings in their programme felt by student teachers and beginning teachers would continue.

This theoretical education demanded by the students and teachers surveyed has to be complemented with practical education based on action research and on reflective practice developed through varied means such as awareness seminars, workshops, simulations, and being together with disabled pupils for regular periods of time. Fortunately today we have at our disposal abundant research that has demonstrated that theoretical classes and reading are not sufficient to modify teachers' and students' negative attitudes towards pupils with special educational needs. On the contrary, it is necessary to complement this type of education with the implementation of techniques and procedures such as those just mentioned (for additional examples of this research see Molina, 2003).

### **5.1.2 · Psycho-Sociological Education Model**

Now I am going to present the basic guidelines of an initial education model which, from my point of view, respects each general consideration mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

According to Filloux and Cols. (1975), from whom I have adopted the name Psycho-Sociological Training Model, the radical and distinctive characteristic of this model is that teacher education should not be based on the presentation of models, nor in pre-established forms, but instead on the emergence of practices which develop forms. In other words, it does not deal with offering future teachers' models of pedagogic intervention through readings, neither through the observation of what other teachers do, but putting into practice, from the very first moment, those methodological strategies, which each future teacher considers more suitable, and then comparing these strategies with the ones used by experienced teachers, reflecting subsequently, in common, about the adjusting or the failure to adjust to such strategies, and finishing the cycle with the readings drawn from an extensive bibliography recommended by the tutor-teacher in the teacher education faculty.

All in all, this approach deals with preventing future teachers from adopting borrowed pedagogical intervention models, either from simple mimicry of what other teachers do, or without reflecting on and thinking about teaching practice. Or which comes to be the same thing: more than offering future teachers pre-established models for each learning situation, for each age group or even for each curricular area, future teachers are expected to get into contact from the beginning of their education with psychologically shared experiences, which acting like varied reference experiences, allow future teachers to feel co-author of these experiences and therefore, responsible for the process and the results.

It goes without saying, that as Filloux states very well, those experiences can be experienced not only in the teacher education centre itself, but also in schools and even in out-of-school community organisations. Or which comes to the same thing: the teacher education centre is nothing but a point of reference, a material support instrument for education, nothing else. Hence, it needs to be open to all types of bi-directional exchanges of pedagogical experiences: from the centre itself out to the surrounding educational community, the visits and *in-service courses* for future teachers in the educational community; and from the surrounding educational community in to the teacher education centre itself, thus allowing access either to regular or continuous expert visitors, or access to all teachers who have something to say.

To sum up, the underlying didactic theory of this model is that teaching does not communicate in only one way. The teacher is, simultaneously, a learner, and the learner is, to a certain extent, a teacher. When it does not happen this way there is no genuine transformational learning, just trivial learning. And when there is only trivial learning, not only the principles and fundamental rights of the individual (especially the freedom of thinking and action) are lost, but also it is clear that the real teachers are the ones who are able to learn from those whom they teach.

So these are the reasons of having called the model 'Psycho-

Sociological Multi-Referenced'. In the first place, there is an experienced involvement of future teachers in the process of their own education (everything that is not self-education is a distortion). In the second place, the compromise adopted by future teachers is not only with themselves, but also with their colleagues, with their teachers and with the pupils for whom they will be responsible. In the third place, a plurality of experienced reference points is presented instead of a unique and standardised model.

As can be shown in the proposed model, the three basic components in the education of every teacher are perfectly assembled: the acquisition of knowledge, the learning of pedagogical practices and research models. And it is not by external imperatives to the education process, such as the existence of required subjects in the curriculum, established external legal norms or an evaluation system with only positive or negative sanctions, and the survival of the teacher's dominant *status* over students, but it is as a consequence of self-evident need that beginning teachers must participate in their own development. It is for this reason that teachers educated through this model are more than technicians in education sciences – they are professionals in human relationships. This does not mean that they do not need to know education sciences deeply, but rather that having this knowledge in an experienced way contrasted with practice will mean knowing is never dogmatic nor finished, and this entails the need for continuous self-improvement.

It is obvious that putting the education model previously outlined into practice entails a series of urgent changes in the teacher education institutions.

In the first place, the institutions should be open, able to foster and allow every sort of meeting and debate, not only among experts, teachers and students, but also among parents' associations, unions and political parties with different positions. In this way, initial and later advanced education are turned into two sides of the same coin, and above all if in such meetings, debates over organisation problems, education development, team-work and formative research are fostered.

In the second place, these colleges or faculties must provide enough up-to-date bibliographic and technological resources, putting them at every teacher's disposal in each region so that they may be used as support for the work of teaching. In this way, future teachers will be able to learn to use such resources and practice with them on specific realities and, in a certain way, even continuing those introduced by competent teachers in the area.

In the third place, staff in these centres not only have to have a good scientific education in their specific area and ample professional experience with the same type of children with whom the future teachers will have to work, but also proven experience in team work techniques, group dynamics and action research. Without lived experience in the use of such techniques and without the conviction of their

usefulness it is impossible to imbue new teachers with new forms of work, since, as Gimeno Sacristán and Fernández Pérez (1980) say: 'it is not the same to know how a group works in the classroom as to begin to create a working group in the classroom'.

In the fourth place, the curricular organisation must be flexible enough so as to allow future teachers to be able to combine the participation of work groups with formative research in their classrooms along with autonomous personal work. This requires, at the same time, an interdisciplinary programme structured through broad thematic nuclei and continuous evaluation through the credit system.

Finally, I note that the proper implementation of this model requires respecting a series of stages, which I do not have space to describe here (those who are interested in consulting these stages, can find them in Molina, 2003).

## **5.2 · Proposals referred to Practical Education**

In the light of the results presented in the previous pages, it seems obvious that in Spain a radical change is required in the role that the teachers' practical education must have at the primary level, not only to meet the special educational needs of the pupils, but also to improve the quality of Spanish institutional education. For this reason, I offer below a series of guidelines, which, from my point of view, would attain the two objectives that I have just reviewed. Obviously, I do not attempt to devise a complete design for the organisation of teaching practice (Practicum) in the initial education of Spanish teachers (for a more detailed study of the theme, see: Pascual & Cols., 1997; Pérez Gómez, 1997; Molina, 1998).

### **5.2.1 · Stages**

According to the model advocated by Gimeno and Fernández (1980), I understand that teaching practice should be carried out along the following stages:

- 1) Scientific/theoretical education in connection with the practice of observation, both direct and indirect, through various means.
- 2) Personal practice of direct intervention in real teaching tutored by the staff of university education centres and guided partly by the schoolteachers who receive students.
- 3) Independent personal practice with direct responsibility in teaching during a long period of time tutored by working teachers in the school centres and supervised by staff of the teacher education institutes, through participatory observation.

These stages coincide completely with the proposals made by Debesse and Mialaret (1982), who advocate these three stages in the teaching practice of future teachers: an awareness period, a period of learning methods and pedagogical techniques, and a period with

responsibility for taking didactic and organisational decisions. In each of these three periods, Debesse and Mialaret include a series of activities and experiences, which are not described here, because the design of an alternative model for teaching practice for future teachers is not the objective of this work.

### 5.2.2 · Planning

Obviously, if one desires that teaching practice be a fundamental curricular component in the initial education of future teachers, the planning of each of the three stages described above cannot be left to chance, as it is equally necessary that the selection of schools is not done with administrative criteria, but with strictly pedagogical and realistic criteria. Now let us see how, from my point of view, the planning of teaching practice should be carried out in the three stages.

#### A) Selection of the schools

I agree with Pérez Gómez (1997: 50) when he states, as a consequence of the results found in research on teaching practice with the students in Andalusia, that the most direct agent in the process of socialisation of student teachers is the tutor-teacher who has been assigned to the student teacher in the school where the student teacher carries out teaching practice, either by the affective relationships that are established between both agents, or because the tutor is the bearer and immediate defender of the patterns of conduct that the school culture requires.

As a consequence of the symbolic power that the tutor-teacher has in the school in the eyes of the student teacher, the future teacher may want to imitate the tutor-teacher in a very positive way, provided the tutor is a reflexive and innovative professional. But in a parallel way, this influence can be very negative if, as often happens, the trainee is assigned a tutor who 'Devalues publicly the pedagogical alternatives, as well as, the theoretical academic studies developed in the university institutions where the vision of generating knowledge, habits and attitudes is narrow and confined to reproducing experience... It seems, therefore, that all approaches to teaching practice lead to the reproduction of behaviours, and the perpetuation of dominating teaching styles in classroom interventions' (see Pérez Gómez 1997: 50-51 Editor). Hence, there is an urgent need to select collaborator-schools and tutor-teachers very carefully.

In order to be able to work with an ample number of collaborative schools whose educational quality is adequate and, above all, which are putting into practice innovative didactic programmes and organisational forms, school selection cannot be left to the teachers, and far less, to depend on the annual allocation which the administration offers the teachers. Schools, which would like to have students for teaching practice, should present to the Universities an innovative project about how the practice would work. The Universities could then choose appropriate schools. Clearly, the Universities should pay the schools to engage in such a rigorous

selection process. At present as an incentive, the fact of having students engage in teaching practice provides them with the possibility of obtaining a set number of education hours, without having to do any course at all, and subsequently have their salary increased, leading to what the administration calls 'a six-year education period' ('sexenios de formación'). Although it seems strange, this is the way in which schools are selected for the student teachers to carry out teaching practice (the practicum) in Spain.

The present rules not only prostitute what good teacher education programming should be, but also prevent the use of schools with excellent quality for students' teaching practice. It is easy to understand that the criteria should be very different (for example: the chosen schools should have received a positive evaluation by a non-governmental agency or to have participated in innovative organisational and methodological programmes).

In a society in which the predominant value is the level of income of each person, along with the social prestige of each profession, it seems sensible to admit that the incentives for the teachers in the collaborating schools should have a double objective. On the one hand the objective is to increase the salary of the collaborating teachers substantially, and on the other hand to offer the possibility of turning them into university part-time associate teachers. Both objectives could easily be achieved if the governing authorities in the universities were conscious of the importance for the harmonious development of society to promote excellence in teacher education. It is evident that if this consciousness existed in the universities, the governing authorities would demand educational administrations to set aside funding for payment of the salaries of the collaborating teachers.

It should be observed that I have said that the universities should be the ones that, in an autonomous way, select the collaborating schools and which, consequently, pay the collaborating teachers - instead of leaving the issue in the hands of the educational administrations. The reason for this is easy to understand: if it is accepted that the teachers in the collaborating schools are, at the same time, associate teachers in university colleges in charge of teacher education, obviously the universities have to be the ones that select them and take charge of their salaries.

This proposal has various extra advantages. A greater connection between the university centres and schools would be achieved. This would end the separation that exists at present between theory and practice concerning teaching in the institutional context of teacher education. In parallel, action research should be fostered, with the real participation of students in teacher education institutes. Equally, this would allow the design of plans for an absolutely realistic teaching practice, since collaborating teachers and university teachers would participate in this planning. Besides, the fact that it is not possible to teach student teachers in the teaching methods of the different curricular areas would be demonstrated when those who teach those subjects



have never taught them to pupils in pre-school, primary and secondary education in authentic contexts.

#### B) Annual preparation of the School Practice (Teaching Practice Subjects)

The design of teaching practice makes no sense at all if it is not realistic. In other words, it is worthless to draw up a wonderful and spectacular design if there is no guarantee that, subsequently, it is possible to put it into practice. For this reason, it seems fundamental to me that this preparation should be planned annually with rigorous criteria, which implies that the planning teams should be integrated with collaborator teachers from the schools in which this design will be implemented, and with the teachers in the university centres who are in charge of the future teachers' education. At the same time, this demands that in the teaching programme of the teachers there is the time necessary to plan this seriously each year with realistic criteria.

I think it is extraordinary that there are still university centres, which in their teaching practice organisation do not consider a minimum number of hours for the annual preparation of this design in the same way as they plan a predetermined time for lectures or monitoring teaching practice. Likewise, it seems incredible that in the annual plans of teaching, a set number of weekly hours are not contemplated, as is for the rest of the subjects, so that the students may receive the appropriate orientation and may practice with the necessary technical resources that afterwards they will have to use with the children in their classrooms.

As it was shown when I presented the results, one of the most common complaints of the student teachers and of the beginning teachers makes reference to the fact that they arrive in schools on the same day they have to face the children in their classrooms, without having previously known what they are going to be asked to do, or without having analysed the resources that they are supposed to use during the period of stay in the collaborating schools. The problem becomes grotesque when the teacher has to face pupils in a classroom without having previously clarified the minimum objectives they have to achieve, the rights and obligations of each educational partner, without knowing the technical resources, and without having discussed the criteria for evaluation.

In view of this appalling situation it is perfectly explicable (and perhaps also justifiable) that a good number of university teachers, in charge of supervising the teaching practice of their students, end up giving the highest marks to a curricular component as important for future teachers as teaching practice. Likewise, it is absolutely understandable that some university teachers categorically refuse to participate in this institutional farce, taking responsibility for other subjects so that they cannot be obliged to supervise teaching practice. Obviously, this vicious circle will only be able to disappear when the due importance is granted to the annual preparation of teaching practice.

### C) Supervision of the Teaching Practice

A common complaint of student teachers and beginning teachers refers to the fact that, once they are located in their schools, they do not receive the orientation they require to meet the demands of the pupils, or the demands imposed by the university staff. This situation is easily explained, since usually the university staff members have never collaborated previously with school teachers (therefore, the university staff neither know what the school teachers expect from the student teachers, not what the characteristics of each school are), nor the rights and obligations of the educational partners.

In the past, this supervision was fairly clear, since the only thing that was asked was that each student explain a topic from the different subjects of the curriculum in some specific years, in the presence of the teacher from the education institute. This teacher had previously shown his or her student teacher how to make this explanation and, consequently, the only thing that the university staff member had to check was that each student teacher followed his or her indications. It goes without saying that nowadays this model of teaching practice has no consistency.

As it is well known, nowadays the view is that the teacher has to be a mediator in the students' learning processes and it is the student that has to build and devise his or her own way of thinking. The mediation of the teacher, the resources of the social context, provides the student a context for meaningful and transferable learning and allows professional experts to intervene in the teaching-learning process. It is for this reason that the organisation and the management of the mediation processes have become the prime requirement of the didactic praxis.

Understanding the teaching-learning process in this way, any practicing teacher has more complex work than simply explaining a topic or a didactic unit. It is for this reason that the supervision of teaching practice requires the support of various professionals, who, if they are not very well coordinated, cannot accomplish these complex tasks. In other words, the problem of the correct supervising of teaching practice cannot depend on the willingness of university staff, but it depends on strict institutional planning of teaching practice instead.



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## Footnotes

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- 20 The assistance of Elías Vived Conte and Pilar Arranz Martinez is gratefully acknowledged.
- 21 I avoided interpreting this term as educational psychology courses may have different contents in different countries. (Editor).
- 22 (Editor 's note: In this chapter some words are left as appropriate translations of the Spanish because this is the language used in Spain. In Ireland, for example, for "mental retardation" we substitute phrases like "intellectual disability".
- 23 These figures represent the sum of the percentages referred to in the categories considered as "pupils with severe special educational needs" which appear in Tables 1 and 3.



# Helping beginning teachers take account of pupils special educational needs in Italy

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## 1 · Introduction

The Italian educational system is waiting, at present, for the enactment of numerous legislative innovations that will transform completely the landscape of scholastic institutions. In particular, the law of the *Reform of the educational system of instruction and training*, of which the practical effects are expected soon, designs a new identity for schools in terms of didactics, organisation, financial management and of research and development.<sup>24</sup> Already this year, the Autonomy law (n. 59/1997) allows every school freedom of choice about their methodologies, tools, organisation and times of teaching, in respect of pupils and of their educational needs. This latter law provides for the organisational autonomy that allows flexibility of service and continuity within the local context of educational institutions. In addition, in terms of financial autonomy, the schools prepare proper budgets for providing for demands that are gradually being individualized.

A new dimension of Italian educational institutions is expressed in the P.O.F. (*piano dell'offerta formativa*; proposed educational plan) that every school is obliged to complete at the beginning of the year and that introduces, in a detailed way, the context where it applies, the planning of activities intended to start in the year (including extracurricular projects), the resources present in the location, the objectives intended to be achieved through flexible organisation of teaching to answer the requirements of the pupils it is serving.

The research-action undertaken within the Comenius project, “*Aider les enseignants débutants à prendre en compte les besoins éducatifs particuliers des élèves*”, has taken place in schools with very similar social and cultural contexts, but situated in areas that experience different problems.

In particular, the nursery schools involved in the research are located in Bari and their pupils mostly come from a middle to low class area.

The primary schools involved in the Comenius project, belong to one of the areas of Bari considered “at risk” because of quite severe difficulties in respect to social and cultural disadvantage, as well as to an elevated level of both petty crime and organised criminality. In the older suburban parts of the city, almost all the pupils live in difficult family situations and have either learning problems or problems with relationships; in the other areas, the pupils are more heterogeneous but this does not allow the creation of either a peaceful school atmosphere or the conditions for promoting democratic coexistence.

As regards the lower secondary schools, they are located in the province and they are well organised, as they are the only centres with clear educational plans and systematic educational programmes. We know this from what the teachers involved in the project have indicated and they have warned about the lack of collaboration by the authorities, and in particular, they could not use economic resources or the help of external experts.

Concerning the upper schools, located in the province of Bari and Foggia, the teachers have not been able to have discussions with the other teachers during the meetings organized by our university research group, because they were busy at very regular school meetings. However, they have emphasised, in the reports we received, that their pupils are mainly low or middle class.

## **2 · Elements that promote the awareness of teachers**

The research-action conducted within the Comenius Project 2.1 has shown that the decision to take responsibility for the specific needs of the pupils is the result of a long reflective process and decision-making arising out of observing the pupils' behaviour, interpreting its possible causes and of developing individual plans of work.

The description of the needs of pupils is undertaken beginning from the identification of a problem, in some cases perceived as a difficulty in the cognitive-learning or social-relational domain, in other cases as a real difficulty in didactic communication.

In general, the passage from the awareness of the problem to its expression in verbal form (with whatever words) represents a particularly delicate phase, on account of the way in which the possible condition of difficulty/unease of the pupil is recognised and labelled. This seems to depend above all on a “*professional personality*” that derives: a) from the discipline and the methodological-didactic and organisational competences, b) from the personal visions of the teaching-learning process, c) from the “emotional intelligence”, and finally, d) from the sensitivity of teachers.

In this process the importance of representations and implicit flashes of insight that inform their teaching emerges from the analysis of the logbooks and summaries written by the teachers. An important distinction is needed between interpreting teaching as b1) a *linear* process that automatically drives learning or, as b2) alternatively a *circular* or *spiral* process that aims to build favourable conditions for learning, in the conviction that learning is the result of numerous and complex variables that do not refer exclusively to teaching, but strictly depend on the pupils, their histories and to the contexts in where they live.

The act of learning is considered, consequently, as a complex, slow and gradual process that sometimes can be studded with difficulties, obstacles, even blockages if not regression. In the conception b1) above, the teachers see themselves, above all, as transmitters of knowledge: in b2) above, the teachers try to support growth, to develop in other words a role of accompaniment of the children and of the teenagers in a delicate negotiation of development and education.

In this situation, the teacher acquires an indirect function that - above all in terms of awareness of specific educational needs - cannot coincide with the function of “saviour”: through a dialogical and democratic style, the teachers (as teaching professionals) don’t lose the traditional educational outlook, but rather wear the clothes of “explorers” of the macrocosm of knowledge, valuing the heuristic dimension of teaching as an autonomous path towards the discovery of themselves, of the others and of the world.

Another remarkable dimension inside the imagination of the teachers concerns the construction of a model of the ideal pupil (disciplined, obedient, diligent and responsible) that often sets itself in antithesis with some dominant juvenile icons (like that of the “bull”) and that, especially in the high school, this constitutes a solid point of reference on which to anchor the perception of diversity in the behaviour of the teenagers busy in the difficult discovery of their own unique identity.

In the school of nowadays, the ideal pupil image assists in

a dangerous tendency to depersonalise pupils. This happens when adherence to a stereotyped image of pupils constrains the free expression of the personality of each educational partner, interfering with the authentic perception of the heterogeneity of all and also of the specific educational needs of individuals.

Far from specifying a rigid barrier between normality and diversity, the representations that the teachers build around their own pupils open an important window on the perception of the educational context like an interactive system, or rather on the awareness of belonging to a group or a community where each one sees himself in relationship to how the others see him, in the difficult equilibrium between “to be” and “to have to be”: that is between personal convictions and social conventions.

It would be interested to make a careful study of educational images, taking into consideration specifically the way in which pupils see their own teachers, with the hypothesis that the inevitable construction of an image of ideal teacher influences in some measure the attitude of the pupils toward the school and their studies, with important effects on their self esteem and their motivation for learning.

### **3 · Analysis of needs, conducted by the teachers**

The analysis of needs is central to the process of valuing the heterogeneity of the pupils in the individualisation of teaching/learning.

The Italian research team has elaborated, together with the teachers involved in this research-action, a set of criteria for writing their logbooks, that are considered useful and effective survey tools for recording qualitative and quantitative information, so as to throw light on the complexity and diversity of their teaching approaches.

Using this tool, the teachers have undertaken structured observation of the behaviour of particular pupils with the aim of identifying their problems and subsequently to identifying possible specific needs.

The logbooks show narratives in which much space is devoted, besides the presentation of the case and the context, to the interpretation of interactions between the teacher and the pupil and between the latter and his or her companions, through the functional analysis of some particular behaviour that is seen as a possible indicator of specific educational needs.

The plan of this observation, undertaken between September-October 2002 and February-March 2003, focussed on noting critical episodes in different teaching situations, without excluding recourse to other methods of investigation either direct or indirect (e.g., interviews with colleagues, with companions, with families as well as with the pupils themselves and analysis of study materials and evaluation records).



In the nursery school, the main difficulties of pupils are in the social-relational domain, and consist of physical and verbal aggressiveness, impulsiveness, hyper-activity. In the cognitive-learning domain they consist of difficulties with attention and concentration, deficits in written and oral language and motor difficulties.

In general, the problematic behaviours of the pupils analysed consist in constant efforts to attract the adults' attention, the need to be recognised and valued, and fear of failure with associated anxiety about performance.

Research into the causes of problematic behaviour has fundamental importance at this of school level in view of the importance of early diagnosis of possible deficiencies that, if not identified and cared for promptly, can compromise the child's normal psycho-physical development.

As regards the primary school, the children observed had low levels of esteem, perception of self-efficacy, and difficulties identifying their own areas of strength and weakness. Therefore, they need specific interventions in relation to motivation, meta-cognition and social abilities. The children need to strengthen their autonomy through promoting auto-regulation of both their cognition and behaviour.

In the lower secondary school, the needs of the pupils are mainly due to the typical behaviours of a particular age group: early adolescence. In class it is possible to notice frequent actions of violence and physical aggressiveness toward companions, verbal conflicts with teachers, behaviours that disturb others, distraction and lack of motivation in relation to educational activities, and quite poor study habits associated with attempts to abandon school.

In the upper secondary school, the attention of teachers is focused mainly on needs that refer to the emotional-affective and social-relational sphere.

The boys show a low level of self-esteem and a constant tendency to provoke and challenge adult figures. Their relationships with companions and above all with the opposite sex are very conflictual and they seem to have an important influence on classroom behaviour.

The problematic behaviours described take place in relation to particular episodes of real or presumed interpersonal conflict and appear both explosive and disproportionate to the situation. It is possible to interpret them as indices of a specific need because they have negative effects on the self-respect of the perpetrator and of the other teenagers, and indeed also on the classroom climate. Besides, they have negative effects on both class work and educational relationships with both companions and teachers.

Regarding the relationship between a teacher's *seeing* and *doing*, observation of a pupil's behaviour is, without doubt, a useful tool for taking action on a problem: *to see means substantially to have*

*conscience*. Yet, the rare habit of systematic observation that sometimes characterises teachers at the beginning of their working career (observation is often undertaken extemporaneously and driven by good sense rather than scientific hypothesis), leads to the construction of a very close link between *seeing* and *having done*, in the sense that the teachers often resort to using solutions in analogous circumstances to what worked previously.

A fundamental component of a teacher's professionalism consists in the ability to manage the unpredictable in the educational relationship with single pupils and indeed with the whole class. Since there is a tendency for some teachers to delegate the moment of intervention (because I am not able to do or because it is not my task), there is a need for specific contributions (from an advisor or an expert) in the search for possible solutions.

#### **4 · Answers or solutions introduced by the teachers**

The answers or possible solutions introduced by teachers differ considerably according to the grade levels. This is due to the age of the pupils and from the specific ways teaching is organised at each level of the educational system.

In the nursery school, problem behaviours are sometimes due to pupils trying to escape from boring or even frustrating situations: so, to stimulate motivation and encourage participation in activities, children may be given roles of responsibility as catalysts for more positive behaviour.

The proposals from teachers from primary schools and lower secondary schools refer to the need to adopt an educational attitude that is not punitive that produces reassurance and satisfaction (emphasising the ineffectiveness of the direct reproach).

Amongst the educational activities that are successful in allowing specific needs to emerge, teachers recommend role-play (or in general games of fantasy) and expressive and narrative activities. Through the assumption of different roles and identification with characters in the portrayal of stories, children are able to express their own emotional and affective needs and manage unexpressed conflicts through experimental collaborative action.

In the primary school, the search for relevant answers/possible solutions is linked to teaching strategies that can reduce problem behaviour and develop abilities needed for both learning and for participation in the educational life of the class. Particularly, the activities of group work, role-play, story-telling, drama, conversation and listening are used frequently, and in one case a specific strategy called *goal setting*.

At the level of classroom learning, the principal objective of the proposed teaching methods tried to strengthen the sense of self-efficacy and privilege satisfying experiences to allow the children to feel competent, autonomous and to manage their own learning.

At the level of socialisation, the solutions identified by teachers are designed to strengthen the degree of group cohesion in the class through cooperative games in which children investigate the importance of the rules and the positive interdependence between group members.

In the lower secondary schools, the problems of pupils' adaptation are particularly associated to the educational context, which is in many aspects completely different from that of the primary school. Besides, there are issues concerning the continuity of the curriculum from year to year and also educational planning is often lacking and not coherent.

In this age group (lower secondary), it is important to build the basis for a relationship of trust and mutual respect between teachers and pupils. The latter need to see their engagement recognized through verbal praise or suitable rewards in evaluations and reports, but it is evident that the most effective strategies concern introducing new teaching approaches to deal with pupils' emerging specific educational needs, through activities such as formative autobiographies or proposals linked to the daily activities of pupils outside school.

In the upper secondary schools, the teachers have underlined the difficulty, and sometimes the impossibility, of putting in place appropriate teaching strategies, because of the high number of pupils with which they interact in class and also of the small amounts of time at their disposal for professional and personal development.

It is obviously possible to resort to talking directly with adolescents; nevertheless, faced with incidents of particular gravity a punitive and sanctioned strategy of reproach is often used for inappropriate behaviour, followed by expulsion from the class, and readmission only given after an interview with the family.

In order to promote social competencies, group work and cooperative learning are used, while individual conversations and creative writing laboratories are useful for identifying specific needs. Then educational interventions can be individually designed.

The educational-cultural conversations we had were very interesting, because it was possible to examine the self-other relationship, and the list of social-affective problems developed in the peer group.

The pedagogical and didactic answers, introduced by the teachers, are substantially the fruit of personal attitudes refined through their own personal development and their collaboration with expert colleagues.

Taking charge of the identification of specific educational needs implies a change of the theory practice relationship: university education doesn't inspire *teaching to teach* because it is distant from field experience; also teaching practice (present in the degree courses for "primary education" and in the "school of specialization for

teaching in the secondary school”) doesn’t seem sufficient for the development of competencies for the profession of teaching.

In fact, didactic practice is completely absorbed in a daily tissue that unites teachers, pupils and families, requiring a collection of competences on the level of communication and relationships that goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and abilities in terms of the level of contents and the disciplinary methods.

In initial teacher education, it is necessary to undergo a continuous training program in the first years of teaching that helps *to direct the look*, through systematic reflection on “good practices”, or rather on the didactic and educational solutions that have shown able to weave constructive links between observation, planning and valuation. This can verify the measure in which the logical, that drives didactic interventions, is not considered the exclusive and implicitly spontaneous tradition of teachers. The teachers are connected to an organisational vision that necessarily includes the various institutions and local educational agencies, as well as in-service courses, allowing the discovery not of the perfect way of teaching, but of the possible ways of improving themselves.

In conclusion, it is possible to say at the end of the second year of work, that the research has produced, positive results. In particular in identifying and trying out effective strategies to supplement the educational practices in taking charge of the specific educational needs of the pupils. We feel we have a positive result from the diffusion of and the sharing of a new way of teaching, characterised by a continuous dialogue between the different partners in the educational sphere. This is, from being flexible, being more open to reflection and an incessant revision of one’s own attitudes and actions, being aware of one’s personal and group behaviour, in the conviction that the teacher has a decisive role in the construction of a positive image of the school, and is eager to promote the attainment of educational success for each pupil in a democratic society.

## 5 · Pre-service educational needs of the teachers

At the conclusion of this experience, it is possible to recognise that the teachers involved in the research-action have identified clearly deficits in their pre-service education concerning individualisation and also in relation to different teaching activities. This lack is due to at least two reasons; the first one concerns the different modes of initial teacher education; the second reason concerns the educational and didactic innovation that, only recently, has developed different programmes for different school levels.

The different modes of initial teacher education still influence the professional careers of the teachers and, only recently a reform law (n. 53/2003) has put in place a core university education course for all the teachers and does not make distinctions between different areas of specialisation. All Italian teachers start their first

year of service with personal “educational histories”, marked by years of precariousness - in which experiences of teaching have been undertaken and titles of courses of different educational value and some possess diplomas for teaching pupils with learning difficulties. This is sufficient to establish, in a general way, elements of continuity between the core educational courses and education for teaching. Really it is the teachers who build their own educational continuity, searching in the institutional course lists for what they need to deepen their professionalism.

In every case, all the teacher participants in this research-action have shown awareness of their own initial teacher education and they have identified deficits in the contents and in the educational and didactic knowledge. They would have liked a programme of in-service education that was able to fill various individual inadequacies, in different specific cases: a) planning competences, b) organisational, c) relational, d) competences for individualised teaching.

The diversity of the educational needs subsequently competes to strengthen the fragmented innovative “history” of single educational segments.

The primary school (five years of courses for children from 6 to 11 years) is the only level of school that in the last decade has seen reform, with great changes in the didactic organisation and with a different structure of teaching.

The nursery school, which is not yet obligatory, in the last decade has been provided with a new educational course and is going to implement a process of intrinsic innovation independent of the reforms that are announced often but have not appeared in the legislation.

The lower and upper secondary school lives with the difficulty of having a series of reforms that for many years has slowed down the processes of innovation and indirectly opens a large and varied range of experimental options, which are scarcely comparable and valuable at a national level. Nevertheless the teachers of these school levels depend on disciplinary university educational options that are weak in terms of their psycho-pedagogical and methodological planning. They express the need for courses in relation to *professionalism* in relation to the *quality of the learning of the pupil*, to sustain the development of personality to enable them to be responsible and active citizens in the society in which they live.

In spite of the incoherent programmes of initial teacher education and the discontinuity of the processes of educational innovation that hinder every type of clear and organised specification of educational needs, all the teachers of the research-action group have shown the need to “equip themselves” in terms of *theoretical knowledge* and *methodological competences* to guarantee every pupil (*successo formativo*) *educational success*<sup>25</sup>. This is consistent with the most recent reflections in Italian educational thinking and also with what the law on scholastic autonomy wants to assure.<sup>26</sup>

The common worries of teachers who are eager to think about the recent legislative requirements include linking the *democratisation* of the school and teaching, together with attention to the developmental requirements of every pupil – not just pupils with learning difficulties.<sup>27</sup>

There is a need to develop the *ability to observe* both the pupils and classroom situations, to acquire the ability to construct and evaluate technical support tools and observation instruments, as well as in the ability to build *positive educational relationships* to help every pupil in relation to their own personal expression of differences, being accepted in the peer group, and participating in the democratic life of the school. Many teachers refer to the need for support in managing the balance between the axis of teaching and the axis of learning, together with educational skills to facilitate building “a unity of learning” rather than “a unity of teaching”.

How the pupil learns, ways to motivate pupils to learn, and obstacles that limit learning properly, are concerns that the teachers want to discuss with staff from the university. The teachers are eager for in-service courses to help them to plan to teach in ways that fit the personal learning styles of their pupils. In terms of more general needs, there has been a demand for in-service courses in relation to the personal educational “histories” of teachers, and their desire to deepen their levels of professional development.

So, for example, the common problem of adjusting the teaching method to the styles and the difficulties pupils have with learning has been outlined differently depending on the school level. Nursery school teachers have emphasised the need for individualised education; primary teachers have emphasised the need for help in relation to classroom management and teaching approaches; and teachers of lower and upper secondary school have emphasised the need for new teaching skills.

In terms of their education, the teachers have expressed the need of in-service courses to improve their teaching that are not so much given by external educational experts, as by teachers skilled in educational planning and who can “consult” during work projects.

The research-action has been examined to make educational recommendations about in-service on the basis of real educational experiences that can be developed through reflection to be able to value teaching and risk trying out new methods empirically. Nevertheless, as the same teachers have emphasised often, in research-action ideas about the most useful “theories” for the development of professionalism emerge, and the best forms for realising integration between theory and practice, and above all how to work in a way that such integration is verified in the action of teaching. The problem is to promote awareness of the known theoretical characteristics of professional actions and how, in teaching about educational strategies – it is necessary to work in a way that this “theoretical knowledge” becomes awareness of ordinary teaching activity.



## 6 · The formation needs of the educators

During this experience we have seen how important and difficult it is to “share” this type of work between teachers and university researchers. It is a common observation that it is not easy to work in groups: it is possible to examine differences in terms of goals, in terms of the methodological choices about how to work, in terms of interpretations and values concerning the context. We are sure of this after these two years of work.

As we try to resolve these difficulties, not in the attempt to avoid these distinctions, but because the relation between these different approaches remains a constant challenge. The assumption of diversity as a basis for dialogue and for deepening the meanings of interpretations, valuations and planning has marked our way of proceeding and it has provided the means of overcoming many moments of difficulty.

Without doubt the problems we need to solve are wide ranging. Amongst these, an important place is taken by relations between teachers and university educators and by the perceptions of the university educators. These are dimensions that usually we don't think of taking seriously when dealing with professional development and that, also, can be difficult to talk about in clear and direct terms. Besides the different professional dynamics, there are resistances or set ways of doing things, and difficulties with personal relations: if there is not a connection on a personal level, it becomes hard work to articulate problems. It is not enough to declare principles to have a profitable dialogue. Many university educators are not available for such discussions and have other tasks and engagements.

Our culture, more and more characterised by individualism and competitiveness, leaves little space for an authentically collaborative style. Besieged by insecurities, we are afraid of confrontation; we become entrenched in our positions, we define our space as an attitude of defence. But the school is a place of inevitable confrontations and of necessary collaborations. In regard to teacher education, excellence in the disciplines and methodological competence won't be enough, a sensitivity and emotional and relational intelligence will be essential, but not impossible to pursue and to strengthen. Besides, in one's own professional life, having been a teacher is an important factor in teacher education, practical classroom experience enriches theoretical competence.

Also in this context, moments of deep personal reflection, case studies and development of circles of practical knowledge (*circoli di sapere di pratiche*)<sup>28</sup>, of promoting, recognising, underlining, strengthening, elaborating – all these will contribute to the development of a teacher's own “professional personality”. The good educator and the good teacher are people who we remember with intellectual “gratitude”, the contributions of consent, of affairs, of clarity of critical reflection that they have been able to give us and a “liking” (sometimes a real affection), for the warmth, the cordiality

with which they have treated us, anything else other than “formal”, and “the official”. These are the teachers and educators who have been able to see “the other” not only as pupil and/or colleague, but also as a subject-person, as an individual.

Besides, the educator’s possession - in their own professional history – of direct experiences of teaching, more than university experience or research experience, constitutes an important factor in the beginning of educational work. Theoretical competence will also in this case enrich itself through its relation with practical experiences.



## Footnotes

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- 24 The Reform Law n. 53 of 3/2003 lays down general norms for teaching in schools across the 13 year curriculum, the high school is of a duration of five years and for the first time, it introduces the possibility of enrolment to the nursery school at the age of 2 years and half and to the primary school at the age of 5 years and half. The general lines that direct the Reform of Italian school are verifiable:
- in a new definition of the educational, cultural and professional profile of the student based on the attainment of competences that recall the totality of the person, and therefore his knowledge, abilities and attitudes;
  - on the valuing of differences that occur through personalised plans of study, which are programmes of learning calibrated on the single student;
  - on new systems of valuation that refer to the “portfolio”, a document that follows the student in the first 12 years of his educational course and that characterises itself as an instrument for evaluation, professional development and inservice education;
  - on new attributions of responsibility entrusted to a figure of teacher “tutor” who has different functions: coordinating, planning and assuring the coherence and the progression of the educational course of each student facilitating and strengthening his personal relationships and education.
- 25 “Successo formativo” is the expression used to indicate the full development of the pupil, in respect of both personal identity and support in the acquisition of autonomy.
- 26 The Autonomy Law (La Legge sull’Autonomia) recognizes each single educational unit as having autonomy for educational, didactic and organisational research.
- 27 In this case, it is necessary to remember that, since 1995, in Italian secondary

schools the autumn examinations have been abolished, and the involvement of the school has been strengthened for ensuring the real success of the students, through teaching methods designed to support learning, overcome past difficulties and value achievements.

- 28 The expression introduced by Dr. Gabriella D'Agostino, working in the Project research group, refers to values, which when expressed by members of an educational community facilitate the development of the sense of affiliation and the capacity for critical/reflexive comparisons, that facilitate the personal construction of professional identity. In relation to group work, the circle of practical knowledge values: a) diffusion of critical/interpretative reconstruction of knowledge as alternative visions of reality, perspectives, perceptions, and values that understand the teachers' practices; b) the realization of a diffused and widened leadership that favours the active and personal participation of the members of the educational community.

# Special educational needs: An experiment in teacher education in Portugal<sup>29</sup>

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## **1 · Context, objectives and methodology**

### **1.1 · Characterization and context**

The research we are describing took place in three different schools: the Graduate School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, basic education (BE) 1 “Estação” school and the former BE 2&3 “Paulo Quintela” school, all of them in the town of Bragança.

Globally considered, the project was divided into three stages:

- a) the institutional characterisation of the Special Education system and educational support in each participant country;
- b) the analysis of the characteristics and nature of education given in each partner institution confronting the needs felt by beginning teachers, considering problems in the instruction of pupils with SEN;
- c) the action-research, with one or more groups of beginning teachers, during part of their first year of professional

experience, was developed in order to help them to integrate and to solve problems in educational work with SEN pupils, these being totally or partially integrated in their classes.

## **1.2 · Research objectives**

The general goals of the project were the same for every participating institution and the research concerning the second and third stages had the following objectives:

- a) to characterise the nature and contents of the initial education of the teachers-to-be, particularly their preparation for the development of a teaching-learning process with pupils with SEN who are integrated in the so-called regular education system;
- b) to follow those beginning teachers who in their first year of professional practice have children with SEN, trying to help them to overcome their difficulties from the theoretical and practical points of view;
- c) to establish a working protocol with these beginning teachers so as to:
  - I. identify the difficulties of pupils with SEN;
  - II. establish a pedagogical programme based on those difficulties;
  - III. compare the results of the evolution of the pupils with SEN in two different moments: at the end of the second term and at the end of the school year;
- d) to evaluate the effect of the work carried out during the action-research process of teacher education;
- e) to diagnose education needs and to consider ways of recycling and intervening.

## **1.3 · Methodologies used**

Following the decision to work with beginning teachers, it was necessary to focus on a very specific methodological problem which could arise. We are referring to the possibility that many teachers-to-be, still in their last year as graduate students, would not be able to find work in the following year and if they did, it could be far away from the location of their original education institution.

Despite this, we decided to take the risk and integrate a group of some final year's students into the task of constructing the education questionnaire.

So, for accomplishing of the first objective, the curricula of the initial graduate programme of the beginning teachers were analysed. Then, a questionnaire with five open questions concerning their period of practice teaching was specified. Both are analysed in section 2 of this report.

Concerning the second goal, our worry about the possibility of a rupture in the initial education of the beginning teachers and their entrance into the profession in fact turned out to be real. So, we were only able to follow the situation of three former-students who graduated from the Graduate Education School of Bragança, specifically related to their education for the 1st cycle of basic education: these former students are AGN, CAC and SCR.

Similarly, the 3rd cycle of basic education could only be examined with four beginning teachers, graduated from the Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro University. These teachers were working at the BE 2&3 “Paulo de Quintela” school in Bragança. According to their answers to the questionnaires, during their graduate program at University, they had never contacted pupils with special educational needs (SEN). These Mathematics and Natural Sciences teachers are: AIMSáG, FMLT, NHPFF and AMCM.

Regarding procedures for the accomplishment of the third objective, our intervention strategy consisted of fortnightly meetings with the teachers, from the beginning of October 2002, and the active observation of ten lessons. In the first two meetings, the difficulties of pupils with SEN were analysed and strategies were established. In the following meetings, results of the strategies used were examined. Afterwards new working procedures were formulated. This pattern continued in all the following meetings.

Finally, as for the fourth stage, the final reports on the progress of students were written. The student teachers were requested to answer a questionnaire with a set of questions based on their professional development, the importance of this research and their opinion about the researchers.

## **2 · The action-research process**

### **2.1 · Description of working processes**

According to what was previously mentioned, we worked with teachers from two levels of education: the lower primary and upper primary level.

We met every two weeks in order to evaluate the difficulties found by teachers and pupils and to take into account new methods of work and evaluation. These meetings started in October 2002 and our primary concern was to characterise pupils' difficulties. Then, each pupil had the chance to choose among one of the three types of specific support: simple pedagogical differentiation, an adapted curriculum, or an alternative curriculum.

When these two stages were accomplished, each meeting became a reflective time with the intention of improving the suggested strategies and supplying new education for the teachers, while bearing in mind the difficulties they faced, which were sometimes emotional ones. Quite frequently, they would speak freely as if they were in

therapy, like they were transferring difficulties, and this helped them recover their self-confidence.

Two moments of global evaluation took place, either based on the working processes of the teachers' group, or on the pupils' performance during the Carnival holidays and at the end of the school year. Finally, we also tried to analyse the effects of this research on beginning teachers and their education.

## **2.2 · Awareness of pupils' needs**

A local team of Educational Support Coordinators decide which teachers will give pedagogical support to each school. Every year in May, the assignment of these teachers to schools is suggested for the following school year to the Regional Board of Education. Different bodies at the schools decide on the integration of SEN pupils in the classes and also decide which teacher will teach which set of pupils. The three primary school teachers worked with pupil A, who was part of a full-time regular class and received daily support in the classroom from a Special Education teacher. On Mondays and Tuesdays also, a Special Education teacher in the library supervised this pupil, along with another pupil who had not such serious problems.

Beginning teachers became acquainted with the pupils' difficulties because these were mostly linked to medical or pedagogical conditions (Special Education pupils) or to the latter only (pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties). Medical conditions were included on the clinical report on which the special learning proposals were based and often led to a specific school curriculum: either an adapted curriculum (in less problematic cases) or an alternative curriculum (in cases of permanent school failure).

This sort of distinction and characterisation of pupils does unfortunately constitute a dangerous *label* for them because teachers and other pupils tend to identify them with other sorts of disabilities (physical or mental). They also tend to deny the pupils' suppression, even if the pupils were able to overcome their problems.

Pedagogical problems were based on pupils' diagnoses and evaluation in learning situations, by groups of teachers, therefore requiring specific support procedures. Most of the time, this only led to differentiated pedagogical practices increasing the number of classes, with very few changes when it came to learning orientation strategies. Nevertheless, this pedagogical characterisation can lead to inducing specific school curricula, which also occurred in our research.

Normally, teachers, especially less experienced ones, detect pupils' specific needs at a late moment, so a school structure is essential to help this detection and characterisation.

As far as the "Estação" school is concerned, its organisation is common to Portuguese Basic Education. The education system is a mono-teaching one (general teacher) and each group of regular pupils

numbers about 25 pupils, reduced to 20 in the case of integration of pupils with SEN. In this case there are at least two teachers in the classroom: the regular teacher and another one specifically for children with SEN. Working with parents, these teachers have the responsibility to coordinate the diagnosis of pupils' learning difficulties and to propose the specific individual learning programme.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles of Basic Education, the education system consists of different subjects, and each teacher is in charge of one, two or three different subjects. Moreover, some teachers are from interdisciplinary fields, as happens with Visual and Technological Education in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, Social and Human Sciences (History plus Portuguese Geography) or Physical and Natural Sciences (Natural Sciences plus Physics and Chemistry), for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles.

Each group of pupils (25 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, and 28 in the 3<sup>rd</sup>) has an average of eight teachers, one of which is the Group Director with a pupils' group. This person must coordinate the institutional procedures of educational guidance and of curriculum coordination. This director must also mobilise the available human resources in order to assist the pupils. When these groups of pupils include integrated pupils with SEN, they cannot be in groups of more than twenty (16 regular pupils and 4 with SEN). Moreover, a single group should not include pupils with distinct etiologies.

The BE 2&3 "Paulo de Quintela" school has two specialised teachers which answer pupils' needs according to the classification done for the national application process, requiring teachers for support and/or Special Education teachers. Those specialised teachers diagnose the needs, guide the elaboration of educational plans of pedagogical and curriculum differentiation, give pedagogical support to regular school teachers, and can, when necessary, work with pupils in areas concerned with deeper needs.

The responsibility of evaluating the pupils' educational needs is shared by the next set of educational partners: each teacher individually, the Group Director, the Group Council and the educational support teachers with specialised training, parents and other people in charge, all shall be heard. The same responsibility is given to them when the construction of the specific instruments of pedagogical and curriculum differentiation is required. Educational partners can specify activities for individualised pedagogical support, while activities in relation to Special Education require a medical or para-medical diagnosis (psychological, psychiatric, logopaedical, among others).

However, the distance between the theoretical models and the real models in daily practice can be huge. Thus, teachers deal with differentiated experiences, making inadequate use of informal relationships to build their professional relationships:

- "In the first term, I found myself floating along" because "I wasn't given clear documentation but a single document that gave information on the special pupils and some rather

- inaccurate and uninformative considerations of them” (NF);
- “I was only given the diagnosis already available for each pupil (...) through a report that was purely clinical. Thus, teachers implied in the project and my on-the-job education supervisor were the ones who helped me most, as well as the education support teachers”;
  - “I took notice, through the agenda-book and later in a Group Council meeting, of a set of general clinical appreciations, not so helpful in terms of pedagogy” (FT and AG).

Bearing in mind the subsequent deepening of the social relationships in an educational environment, which “reveals that pupils are deeply human and merely deprived of friendly consolation, which is what they are sometimes looking for” (AN, CC and SR), teachers expose the inadequacy of the labels used (mentally disabled, motor unskilled, behavioural and emotional problems, deaf, amblyopic, blind, multi-disabled, and the like). In addition, they show the way in which the strategies suggested by other teachers, or even by specialists, “turn out to be unsuitable during the development of a relationship, for facilitating motivation and self-confidence in pupils, particularly those whose skills are more developed than the expectations raised inside the institution” (NF).

### **2.3 · Analysis of pupils’ needs by the teachers**

Despite the classification done by the educational partners concerning pupils’ needs, the creativity and the theoretical background of all participating teachers were manifested, highlighting their individuality and autonomy both in facilitating the construction of the pupils’ sociability, and in their representations of pupils with SEN.

In this process, the teachers noticed the following: the social and school discrimination of the pupils with SEN; and regular pupils’ and teachers’ anxiety concerning social and school expectations towards pupils with SEN. They also confirmed that the official and formal representation of a need did not correspond to pupils’ performance levels and real capacities. On the other hand, the inadaptability of representations, of school procedures and actions is clear in relation to the terminology, needs and cultures of any school’s intended public, which is diversified and incompatible with the stereotype of the perfect pupil.

Thus, concerning pupils with SEN, the most detected stereotypes which were pointed out by the teachers were “what a poor little thing” and “he/she needs compassion”, and in this way pupils must follow the failure prophecies imposed by teachers; but even if they don’t achieve the minimum goals, they must be moved up, “in order to leave school as soon as possible” and “the school can decline any responsibility”.

However, the status of the pupil’s needs analysis show it is an important moment in the determination of curriculum options and



educational support. Its thoroughness differs according to the interest, education and organisational culture of the professionals involved. Therefore, we understand the difficulties of the inexperienced professionals, and their anguish when dealing with situations they cannot resolve.

Concerning our investigation, the evaluation of the pupils' difficulties involved not only previous medical (when needed), pedagogical and family diagnoses, but also an assessment of the relation between the pupils' real behaviour and performance, during the months of September and October 2002, when pupils were observed and their difficulties analysed and tabulated.

Therefore, the pupils' description is generally based on the three levels mentioned above, which we shall exemplify with three case studies:

**Case Study 1:** In the school year 2001/02, pupil A belonged to a class with cases of profound behavioural deficiency. Six of the pupils showed these characteristics, making the classroom very unpleasant and hindering the teaching-learning process. Pupil A tried to imitate the behaviour of his colleagues, becoming aggressive and losing concentration capacities<sup>30</sup>. Pupil A lived in an apartment shared by nine people (his mother, grandmother, three sisters and three uncles). His father had died when he was very young. He used to sleep in a bunk bed with his youngest uncle, who was 23 and his role model. However, this uncle was a drug addict and had had several problems with the police. The other uncles were between 25 and 30, the oldest having got divorced recently. They only worked in part-time jobs. His mother was unemployed and had to become a prostitute to support her children. She has a very rigid relationship with two of her children, one of them pupil A. However, she is very tender with her other children. She was concerned only in sending pupil A clean and well dressed to school. Due to these aspects, the pupil was not used to following any rules and he has not got any notion of the difference between good and evil. At home, his role models were problematic and did not offer him any emotional or social stability.

Concerning cognitive aspects, the pupil did not show any specific problems. His main problems were related to disruptive behaviour which led to lack of concentration, and that was why he was unable to keep up with the subjects, and explained his difficulties in reading and writing.

"We think that pupil A's behaviour is due mainly to serious lack of affection, but also to his father's death, to the chaotic environment at home and to the class he belonged to". (Teachers A, C and S)

**Case Study 2:** Pupil B was presented as having many problems and as a person with moderate mental disturbances. His family is of a low social and economic level that seems to have had a great influence on his below average physical and cognitive development. In fact, the pupil appears to suffer from malnutrition and to be younger than he really is. Pupil B is receiving a food supplement at school.

We were informed by teacher LC, responsible for the pupils with an alternative curriculum that, due to a protocol established between the school and a private company, pupil B had been doing some motivating activities, like painting buildings. These activities might help him acquire a profession. According to the same teacher, the company administrators are quite pleased with pupil B's work.

In short, these were the main difficulties detected during classes by the pupils' teachers: lack of studying habits and methods; lack of concentration in the classroom; generalised disinterest; lack of motivation to study; high absenteeism; and difficulties in interpretation and application.

Apart from the obvious difficulties that pupil B shows, he also misses a lot of classes and has very poor behaviour. He was frequently impertinent with the teacher, making the classroom uncomfortable to be in. He often used blackmail to achieve what he desired: sentences like "I won't deliver my test", "I won't behave", "If this happens, I will go away" or "I don't feel like it" were very frequent. In terms of discipline, his behaviour was highly inconsistent, at times acting normally and at other times in an unacceptable way.

He was very lazy too, and this inertia was very difficult to overcome because the pupil had no motivation to attend classes, to study and to go to school. This was probably the result of his wish to leave school to work, namely to paint buildings like his father did. According to the pupil, his father gives him a little money which he nevertheless considers good compensation.

"We fear that this might lead, in the future, to the exploitation of his work" (Teachers AM and NF).

**Case Study 3:** Pupil C, 16 years old, attends the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and a moderate mental disturbance was detected by a paedopsychiatrist. She is attending an Alternative Curriculum, according to the law by decree no. 319/91 of 23 August, since the school year 2001/2002. It is necessary to say that the pupil has had curriculum adaptations since the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education.

According to her individual plan, determined by the current school year, she attends the following subjects: Portuguese Language, Natural Sciences, Visual and Technological Arts, Religious Education, Physical Education, Guided Study and Civic Education. Besides these subjects and because of her interest in cooking, the pupil helps the school canteen employees in order to promote her autonomy and develop some professional abilities. In order to complete her timetable, she has 7 hours of tuition, 2 hours of Computing and 1 hour in the library, all with the respective teachers of these subjects.

In the classroom, the pupil likes to be alone at the back of the classroom, with no one around her. We can conclude that she likes to be alone, despite talking a lot to her colleagues during the class breaks, including the ones from her class.

During classes, we noticed that this pupil is in urgent need

of affection as she is always trying to attract the teachers' attention. During class breaks, she also approaches teachers to speak about her life and what she enjoys. The lack of affection, demonstrated by this continuous search for attention, is due to several personal and family problems that she experienced, especially a possible rape at the age of 6, and having been taken from her parents' custody and living since then in a public institution<sup>31</sup>. Despite these problems, the pupil shows much affection for her family. The pupil shows an enormous sexual desire, "demonstrating it in an uncontrolled way" (Teachers AG and FT).

## **2.4 · Answers or strategies induced by teachers**

As we suggested before, the work strategies used with different SEN pupils were put into one of three possible contexts: (1) pedagogical differentiation and proper school curriculum, the latter being subdivided into (2) adapted and (3) alternative curriculum.

Pedagogical differentiation was used with pupils whose difficulties were represented as susceptible of being helped with continuous support given to the group of peers. This approach consisted of a combination of measures including adaptation of teaching-learning methods, of school materials and of school time. This would bring about more interaction time between the teacher and the pupil, an appropriate orientation of behaviour, study, research and action and adaptation of the pupil's evaluation. Teachers evaluated their performance in this process as positive, especially when the teacher takes an interest in and accommodates to pupils.

The adapted curriculum approach was used with pupils considered able to reintegrate the normal process of learning, which implied their dependence on institutional expectations. Apart from this, these pupils should be integrated into the appropriate class for their age, in other words, they could only have a delay of two years behind their age group.

Adapting the school curriculum to the pupils implied the following: implementing pedagogical differentiation strategies, limiting contents to the minimum thought indispensable for school success which could be compatible with the follow-up of their studies beyond compulsory education, and regular withdrawal from the group of peers for short term experiences with specific individual activities.

The alternative school curriculum adapted to pupils was used for the remaining pupils, whose difficulties were represented as impeding a normal continuation of education beyond the compulsory level. Such a curriculum consisted of, besides pedagogical curriculum differentiation and adaptation strategies, exemption from school attendance for some subjects, substantial reduction of attendance for some other subjects, and practice of specific activities in an occupational education workshop.

We observed that a main point in beginning teachers' performance consisted of their relation to pupils with difficulties. The teachers' beliefs are based on the possibility of pupils' recovery and the empathy that results from these relationships. These empathies combined with the strategies gave rise to important changes in pupils' attitudes related to school and school performance.

The institutions connected with the education system (school social assessment, at both school and city levels, social security, professional training, and health system) did not always work efficiently. However, we did also witness a lack of procedural coordination and absence of a social project on the conception of the educational process as a result of a synergetic network interaction among the different institutions. These institutions still live closed in on themselves, and emphasize their objectives to themselves, instead of emphasizing their objectives for society.

As the participating teachers in this project report, the beginning teachers never gave up active and interested behaviour when facing pupils' problems and requests for help. It is therefore fair to emphasize the positive actions of the Curriculum Department coordinators, of Special Education and Support Teachers and the activity and involvement of the school governing body.

According to teacher AM, the main question is that, "all of us are confronted with education gaps, with difficulties with know-how that imply we seek recourse to instructors or research. Our education influenced, but did not allow us to have the necessary quality in SEN intervention at all. And, when we turned to specialists for help, we encountered the same difficulties. Theoretically speaking, everything seems to have a solution, but, in practice, each case requires the construction of a new theory".

As for teacher NF, the idea we have about this process is that, "it is easy to recognize that a majority of teachers and instructors give their best, but they don't possess appropriate education or essential resources. This way, the human dimension is the most important one. Ability, art, devoted relationships, empathy and specificity of didactics are essential tools for teachers".

## **2.5 • Teacher education needs**

In this section we shall discuss the importance of assessing participant teachers involved in this survey (2.5.1) and then the investigation process (2.5.2).

### **2.5.1 • The initial education of participant teachers**

The initial education of participant teachers finished in the school year 2001/02 in the Graduate School of Education of Bragança (teachers for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycles of Basic Education) and in the Educational Department of the Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro University (the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of Basic Education).

In this university, the beginning teachers said that their initial and formal education was not related to pupils with SEN (one of them admitted having done an essay on SEN within the subject of Educational Psychology), and they were able to verify this during their first working year.

In the Graduate School of Education of Bragança, the initial education of the beginning teachers who worked with children with SEN was:

- a one-semester subject (Introduction to Special Educational Needs) comprising 45 contact hours, and
- working directly with children with SEN, on a supervised on-the-job training, which consisted of dealing with two or three children for four months.

During the on-the-job-training, we can confirm that the situations were different and not synchronized, so pupils were confronted with different contexts of integration.

In order to analyse their education, they had to answer a questionnaire (see Annex). The results were based on 101 replies: 28 by pre-school educators, 38 by the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education teachers, and 35 by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycles of Basic Education teachers.

After the analysis of the results of the three beginning teachers groups, we can draw the following conclusions:

- 50% or more of the opinions were associated with the characteristics of these three groups of teachers;
- the three groups had similar answers: the pre-school beginning teachers were the group with less contact with children with SEN, because this level of education does not require compulsory attendance, which is harmful for children at the age of pre-school education;
- initial education is unsatisfactory, especially when related to theoretical needs, but practical experience is also insufficient;
- the number of non-answers reached 25% and 33% in questions 2 and 3 (see Annex);
- the analysis of the first question concluded that the experience acquired during the on-the-job education with pupils with SEN was diverse, owing to the fact that these pupils presented nineteen different types of needs and they were divided into groups of four elements. Two or three beginning teachers in each group of the on-the-job education faced only one or two of these types of needs;
- related to this question, the answers of the pre-school beginning teachers were focussed on Trisomy 21 and on language difficulties, while the other groups demonstrated a large number of mental disturbances, learning difficulties, dyslexia and hearing problems;

- as far as the second question is concerned, “Can you describe a situation in which you diagnosed one of these needs?”, there are a diversity of answers. The diagnosis of the difficulties was established by direct observation or by indication from supervisors and other peers about the pedagogical practice. The beginning teachers had to do specific work in order to succeed in their dialogue with the pupils. To thoroughly examine their knowledge, the beginning teachers had to create intervention strategies, such as paying more attention to pedagogy, adapting didactic materials and individual teaching.
- when it comes to the third question, “When making this diagnosis did you feel the need for complementary education?”, all the pupils showed the need for complementary education; the most common answer was “the need for specific education related with each case”. This need can be solved by one of these three ways: by research, by seeking counselling with a teacher specialised in SEN, by using teachers with more experience or experts in this area;
- there was no difference between the groups of beginning teachers in their initial education;
- in the fourth question about the training provided by the institution in relation to this need, the majority of answers (51%) valued the contents learned in the subject Introduction to Special Educational Needs, though this was not connected with professional practice. The Pedagogical Practice of Interdisciplinary Seminars, which were held three hours per week, were also considered to be helpful (in 28%), as well as the reflection, analysis and evaluation during the on-the-job training;
- the most significant conclusion is that the topic SEN should be one of the most important in the education program, and should be adapted to a two-semester subject and have more interaction with the professional experience;
- finally, concerning the fifth question about the methodologies that were given in teacher education, the answers confirmed the previous conclusion: they felt their education was theoretical, unsatisfactory and disconnected with professional practice, though the students thought that teacher education was very important to solve the problems of pupils with SEN;
- nonetheless, if the education still had its flaws, they should be solved through close interaction with the professional situations.

### **2.5.2 · Representation of education resulting from the research process**

It was possible to distinguish two different attitudes in the two groups of teachers in their first approach to pupils with SEN. The

1<sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education teachers with sensitisation to SEN who were used to working with children with SEN turn out to be more receptive and capable of researching bibliographical, human, social and institutional resources by themselves. The four teachers graduated in UTAD (Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro University) were initially apprehensive and dependent on the specialised teachers and leaders of the project, and demonstrated scientific and conceptual agility to solve their problems.

The information given to these teachers was provided as situations and problems appeared, ranging from simple questions concerned with didactic and technical structure to theoretical and conceptual formulations about the different kinds of needs. We noticed a great receptivity in the two groups of teachers to both education and professional development, which has been very helpful to the project.

In the questionnaire we provided to the seven teachers at the end of the research, we noticed great satisfaction with regard to the work fulfilled, and professional enrichment that has opened doors to new development and improvement. We also noticed the limitation of the theoretical and professional perspective of this education-research, because each teacher only worked with a very restricted number of pupils with SEN, which can be illustrated by the following opinions: "I feel more aware and sensitive to an immense path I could go through," said NF; "It was very important to me to see how happy these pupils were when they were evaluated within the range of their powers and not by their colleagues' standard," reported AM.

A better understanding and acceptance of integration were also achieved, as ways to improve not only the democratisation of teaching, but also of society itself. However, AM points out that the lack of training, supervision and resources can lead some teachers to reject pupils with SEN.

As for education needs, teachers coming from UTAD agreed that initial education in SEN is essential. Consequently, they referred particularly to diagnosis methods and techniques, the teaching-learning process, individualised teaching, creation of curriculum adaptations and alternative curricula, as well as the need for education in the different areas of SEN. Therefore, one of their concerns was the need for individual education in SEN, or that the schools should have more specialised resources that could provide the necessary guidance for the work of non-specialised teachers.

It becomes clear that there is the need for all institutions with initial education to revise their curricula, in order to provide good theoretical and practical education in SEN to teachers-to-be, along with the need for continuous education to be organised and structured in such a way that all teachers could achieve minimum education in all SEN areas, overcoming difficulties in the continuous education process.



## **2.6 · The needs for education of instructors**

It seems appropriate to conclude that there is an interaction between theoretical and practical education, both in initial and in-service education. The results reached throughout this project show that the “banking training” (Freire, 1975: 81-107), a concept updated by José Alberto Correia as “passive education at school”, according to a project methodology, must be replaced by education in and for action.

Accordingly and bearing in mind the diversity of the current school population, education in all SEN areas is relevant. However, as far as regular teachers are concerned, we point out the following aspects that should be included in teacher education:

- learning difficulties;
- emotional and behavioural problems;
- mental disability;
- communication techniques and technologies;
- symbolic representation, signification and multiculturalism;
- different curricula;
- teaching methods and techniques;
- educational relationships.



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## Footnotes

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- 29 (Translated by the Translation Office of the Graduate School of Education of Bragança, together with the 4th year Translation students of the school year 2004/2005).
- 30 The report of two simple critical incidents, by teachers AN, CC and SR, helped to understand pupil A's problems. In the previous year, a special education teacher was in the classroom, helping pupil A who was being orally aggressive in front of other children. His mother was informed and came to the school to find out if what had been told her was true. When the teacher confirmed it, the pupil's mother hit the child in front of the teacher. The pupil had his ear injured for a week. In the second incident, at the beginning of this school year, the teacher of Special Education was helping pupil A in the library, when he suddenly threw a chair at another child. When A was told to apologise and to explain his action, he said just that he didn't like this child.
- 31 We omitted the name of the institution in order to safeguard confidentiality.





## Annex

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## Annex 1: Analysis of the answers to the questionnaire on initial education

Questions	Answers	No. of people	No of answers	Frequencies
1.		101	93	
<b>In your professional practice, have you ever worked with pupils with SEN? If yes, what kind?</b>	<b>Yes</b>			67
	In the borderline IQ.			2
	Mental illness. Attended school only for social integration.			1
	Hearing Problems.			9
	Mental disturbances.			3
	Autism.			1
	Deafness and muteness and need for psychological support because of family environment.			2
	Learning difficulties.			13
	Trisomy 21.			1
	Hyperactivity and tendency to scream.			1
	Problems in concentrating, hyperactivity and visual problems.			2
	Trisomy 21.			7
	Language difficulties diagnosed by the doctor.			10
	Mental illness.			10
	Dyslexia.			6
	Emotional disturbances.			1
	Psychological problems.			1
	Aggressiveness.			3
	Spina Bifida.			1
	Hemiparesis.			4
	<b>No</b>			26
2.	Needs	101	75	
<b>Can you describe a situation in which you diagnosed one of these needs? What was it and how did you solve it?</b>	Retardation on the level of assimilation and the understanding of contents.			3
	Orphan pupil, inconstant behavior.			1
	The pupil did not follow the others, neither intellectually nor affectively. He was eleven years old and the mental age of 7 or 8.			2
	I had no pupils with SEN.			3
	An 11-year-old, still sucking his/her finger and showing very aggressive behavior, such as wanting to kill someone.			1

	Ignoring the lesson, difficulty in concentrating, slowness in writing.			8
	Autistic pupil. The activities had to be simpler and more graduated.			1
	Pupil screaming.			1
	Trisomy 21. The diagnosis was done by the doctor.			7
	Language difficulties diagnosed during observation.			9
	Mental illness.			3
	Hearing problems.			4
	Adaptation difficulties.			1
	Learning difficulties.			9
	Dyslexia.			6
	Difficulties in mathematics.			1
	Emotional disturbances.			1
	Behaviour disturbances.			2
	<b>Intervention strategies</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>67</b>	
	Trying to know the pupils' needs and carrying out adequate exercises.			27
	Dialoguing and paying attention.			12
	Individualized support.			16
	Helping recognize letters.			1
	Individual exercise, with and without images.			5
	Consulting processes, unit plans and curriculum adaptations for the pupils.			3
	Enjoyable activities for efficient learning.			2
	Stimulating activities			1
3.		101	67	
<b>When making this diagnosis and intervention, did you feel the need for complementary education?</b>	No			10
	Yes			50
	Knowing how to work.			5
	Knowing how to work with children with mental disabilities and retardation.			4
	Looking for differentiated pedagogy.			1
	Looking for methodological questions in the development of speaking and writing.			2
	How to keep the pupil motivated in the classroom.			1
	More specific training.			23
	More practical training.			1
	I felt as if I had no training whatsoever.			1

	Yes, theoretical and practical knowledge for the elaboration of materials.			1
	Through dialogue.			8
	Through questionnaire.			5
	Through the help of a specialist.			4
	Knowledge of Sign Language.			1
4.		101	92	
<b>What kind of training did your institution provide in order to deal with this kind of need?</b>	I was only sensitized to the subject.			1
	Too many photocopies and theoretical training, and the like.			3
	I only learned that pupils should have to be taught individually.			1
	The training took place within subjects such as "Introduction to Special Education", a one-semester subject.			16
	Training was too theoretical			8
	I did not have any formation.			10
	I had one subject on SEN.			47
	I attended interdisciplinary seminars to reflect on the evaluation of pedagogical practice and during the on-the-job training.			25
	The previous training was theoretical and insufficient.			12
	I can consider I did not have an adequate training.			1
	The Supervisor gave me the necessary information.			1
	The Supporting Teacher of SEN gave me the necessary information.			4
5.		101	91	
<b>What kind of methodologies were given to you for acquiring the capabilities to deal with the pupils' specific needs?</b>	Only theoretical.			4
	None.			17
	One theoretical subject Introduction to SEN.			18
	Different curricula were discussed.			1
	I learned about SEN in a very superficial way.			3
	The training was enough, globally and heuristically speaking.			1
	The training in methodology was very limited.			5
	The training in methodology was little and very basic.			3
	It is better to use common sense than the knowledge received in training.			1
	I can consider I did not receive training.			5

	I only received training in motor disabilities and it was all very theoretical			2
	Nothing was useful.			10
	I learned about the Ministry of Education's stimulation and individual education programs, anamnesis, case studies, but everything was very superficial.			8
	I had a general subject on Psychology for Interpersonal Relationships.			1
	We spoke about some things, although in a theoretical way, in the subject of Observation Methodology.			2
	My training resulted more from informal discussions.			1
	Pedagogical Practice.			1



# Beginning teachers and their pupils' special educational needs in Brazil

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## 1 • Introduction

### 1.1 • Research Context

This research was undertaken by the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre/RS (PUCRS), Brazil, to analyse and assess the quality of teacher education when faced with different pupils' needs and to present information on significant changes in the teaching-learning process.

The action-research took place in four public schools, in Porto Alegre, which participate in the work for the degree in Teacher Education<sup>33</sup>, and in the School of Education of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), which offers a degree in Pedagogy. The focus of this research was fifteen beginning teachers, ten of whom were taking Fundamental Education and five the degree

in Teaching. Added to these, we selected fifty students from last year's course in Teaching from the four public schools appointed by the Secretary of School for the Rio Grande do Sul and fifty students from last semester's degree in Pedagogy from the PUCRS, doing their on-the-job education, intentionally chosen by researchers who are also teachers in this University.

Information was collected in November and December 2002 and included in-class observations of teaching methods in Fundamental Education and Medium Education, together with the results of Questionnaire II concerning the beginning teachers comments on their teacher education programme and the creation of a portfolio (Zabalza, 1994), which was also a source of information. Students taking the degree in Teaching and students taking the degree in Pedagogy of the PUCRS answered Questionnaire I concerning the preservice student teacher experience.

Of the fifteen beginning teachers who participated in the survey, 60% had a degree in Pedagogy, 40% had a bachelor's degree in another area, 26.6% completed the degree in Teaching and 33.3% concluded a post-graduation course in education. All participants in this research were female, of whom 46.6% were between 20 and 30 years old, 40% between 31 and 40 and 13.3% between 41 and 50.

From the information collected in the questionnaires completed by the teachers who were also the agents or actors in this research-action, we can see that the on-the-job training, at the end of their degree, was done in the following levels and teaching modes: 13.3 % in Pre-school Education, 66.6% in Fundamental Teaching, 6.8% in Medium Education and 13.3% in other levels.

These teachers' experience with children and teenagers was described as follows: activities during leisure time with children and teenagers (1%); in their professional activities with children and teenagers: 40% of the teachers have experience as pre-school educators, 33.3% as assistant educators at school, 26.7% possessed experience in other activities and none of them had experience as monitors. Moreover, none of the teachers had come across associative and voluntary activities or those linked to a specific public (disabled people, delinquents and people with mental disturbances).

## 2 · The Research

From the analysis of the data two categories emerged: **Needs/Difficulties** and **Education**. In the first category, some subcategories were also found, such as the acknowledgement of pupils' difficulties and the analysis of those difficulties and possible application of solutions. The second category, education, comprises the following subcategories: teachers' awareness of incomplete education; generalising the necessary knowledge for articulating and mobilizing previous learning; building supporting strategies and proposals



for continuous education, known as one of the possible ways of qualifying the teaching-learning process and bearing in mind the social and cultural diversity of different subjects at school.

## 2.1 · Becoming Aware

Recognising difficulties in the teaching-learning process points towards thoughts on existing theories, practices and notions, as well as knowledge building processes and elements.

The majority of the students and beginning teachers<sup>34</sup> who participated in this research recognised that pupils with learning difficulties are a reality. The **Acknowledgement** category was elicited in different subcategories previously defined. In the subcategory '*behavioural difficulties*', the most frequent answers appeared under the heading 'difficulties in committing to tasks and with the relationship to work (no work, lack of motivation)'. On one hand, the subcategory '*learning difficulties*', 'recognised failure without analysis' was referred to by just 6.6% of the teachers, 'language proficiency' was mentioned by 20% of the teachers and 'comprehension and abstraction' was indicated by 33.3%. On the other hand, 'command of discipline contents' was considered relevant by 53.3% of the teachers, and the 'relation with the task' by 6.6%. The subcategory '*no specific element*' was indicated by about 86% of the teachers, 'psycho-affective disorders' were indicated by 16%, and problems at social and cultural levels were mentioned by 6.6%. Finally, in the subcategory '*disabilities*', the indicator 'about cognitive functions (including language disorders)' was also selected by 6.6% of the teachers. The teacher participants did not consider other explanations.

Pedagogical work developed by a teacher in a classroom is based on theory, previous study, even when in a given situation, the teacher is not really 'theorising'. Therefore, the saying that 'in practice, there is another theory' should not be understood too literally, because, in fact, teachers adapt a rather general theory to a particular case, though not invalidating the theory itself. Although the application of a theory in a specific case may not generate the results expected, this should not discourage teachers, but should be used as motivation for self-assessment and group-assessment.

Experimenting with a circular methodology, known as 'Ariadne's thread'<sup>35</sup> (which must be undertaken consciously), will allow the teacher to try out innovative actions, which could be reoriented according to the results acquired. Thus, reflecting on achieved theoretical results, which had to be adapted during the on-the-job training in the classroom, can produce new theories.

Everyday knowledge derives from everyday experiences, obviously influenced by the places where they occur, by the ways they are developed and also by the people who participate in them. During this process, questions like where, how and who it is that develops pedagogical experience determine specific situations, so alternatives may work in one situation and fail in another. Therefore, to build up

a group of wider possibilities and strategies, it is necessary to analyse different processes of increasing knowledge and its elements.

This analysis is like a living science, the results of which end up guiding civilization in general. What today is seen as a universal law (e.g., grammatical rules, metric system) has been in the past, a source of disbelief, polemics and experimentation, eventually providing validation and justification. This is nothing less than a dialectic process in pedagogical practice. The constant analysis of teachers in every moment of their pedagogical practice and their involvement with educational praxis makes their involvement in research possible and makes them the authors of their own theories.

## 2.2 · Analysis of needs and difficulties

The analysis of difficulties indicates the need for accompanying pupils in different spaces of the school and the social environment, showing that the practice of teaching is built upon different understandings that consider inherent problems of the teaching-learning process. Several types of intervention are considered necessary, even if the problem is always thought to be dependent on pupils and their environment.

In the category **Analysis of difficulties**, most teachers specified that there is a need for accompanying pupils who show learning difficulties in specific ways. The need for accompanying pupils everyday in the classroom was emphasized, thus allowing the identification and analysis of learning difficulties. This analysis appeared in different subcategories defined in the research. For instance, in the subcategory '*ways of detecting difficulties*', 6.6% of the teachers 'did not specify the way of detecting difficulties', 33.3% indicated that the way of detecting them was 'through direct observation, without a specific analysis tool', 26% declared that they detected difficulties through 'information collected outside the classroom' and 60% through 'evaluation proposed by the teacher'.

Furthermore, in the subcategory '*analysis of the pupils' difficulties*' only the heading 'difficulties in committing to tasks and the relationship with effort (no work, lack of motivation)' was considered by 16.6% of the teachers and 'learning difficulties' was not chosen by any teacher. In another subcategory '*considered explicative elements*', 16.6% of the teachers pointed out 'no specific element' and only 6.6% of them identified 'disability of cognitive functions', though other indicators were not referred to by the participants in this investigation.

Finally, in the subcategory '*solutions proposed by the teachers*', 16.6% of them contemplated the heading 'none', 40% indicated 'organization of individualized help, tuition, differentiated pedagogy', 16.6% mentioned 'personal attitude of the teacher (strictness, more attention, a closer relationship)', 6.6% contemplated 'help from schoolmates' and 20% agreed on the importance of 'partnership

and institution resource' with the purpose of 'keeping pupils in the classroom'.

From what was previously mentioned, it is clear that in the practice of teaching there are different understandings concerning inherent problems in the teaching-learning process. Also we see that teachers observe learning difficulties through their pedagogical practices. The teachers analysed pupils' needs and looked for different intervention strategies both inside and outside the school environment to overcome their pupils' difficulties. In this way, the difficulties were understood from the perspective of the pupils and their environment.

### 2.3 · Answers or solutions presented by beginning teachers

Beginning teachers refer to the importance of establishing strategies, resources and systems for supporting pupils during the search for possible solutions to learning problems, highlighting family participation in the school community. These ideas reveal the need for collective work, mainly with the family, within a partnership framework, from which individuals look for alternatives to qualify pedagogical practice and the process of learning.

In the category **Answers or solutions presented by teachers**, most of the beginning teachers revealed that it is through the family that pupils are guided to specialised professionals (outside school) and to the school community.

Teachers identify interesting aspects about the construction of strategies and the demands this has and about the constraints that make this approach harder. This is clear in teacher A's comment: "The support of the family is necessary, as well as help from specialised professionals: including psychologists, psychiatrists, speech therapists, and neurologists". On the other hand, teacher B said that it is necessary to "work in a more integrated way with other colleagues from other subjects, in order to establish a unified language and degree of demand, and to look for solutions to overcome difficulties". Accordingly, teacher H adds the following: "It is urgent to build these strategies, but in the meantime what we do at school is send pupils to psychologists and speech therapists. A greater contact between these professionals and the teachers is also necessary to allow pupils to achieve their full development, as well as interact with their parents, so that a relationship can be built and pupils can be heard".

Teachers' opinions can found in the subcategory '*need for deeper education*'. Most beginning teachers (53.3%) referred to the heading 'education without the need for details', 16.6% indicated no need for education at all; still, 'pedagogical processes (technical and professional abilities)' were mentioned by 33.3% of the beginning teachers in this investigation. In the subcategory '*asking for help*', 40% of the beginning teachers did not indicate any need for help, and 20% asked for help, though did not specify what type. The resources and methods inside and outside the school are together part of the 'educational partnerships' needed to find possible solutions to prob-

lems presented to the teachers. In this way 33.3% asserted the importance of this support relationship at school and in society.

In this context, some beginning teachers presented the need to share work between the family and other professionals to achieve a better understanding of learning difficulties. We can highlight the need for contact with the family and the need to send pupils from the classroom to specialists in different conceptual areas. This is what teacher “B” observed in her report when stating, “I feel the need for help”. Teacher “I” highlighted the importance for the exchange of information: “Yes, I spoke with in-service education students of Psychology and brainstormed with my colleagues”. Consequently, these ideas reveal the need for collective work in a reflective perspective, from which teachers think and search for the construction of new knowledge that will become the basis of their pedagogical practice.

It is also worth saying that one of the beginning teachers revealed the need for sharing doubts, questions and concerns common to the school daily routine, thus assuming a conscious co-responsibility, in that working with other professionals is of the utmost importance for positive evolution of each situation in the institution. This is clear in teacher “A’s” comment: “The difficulty lies in the fact that isolated work is not enough, I mean, the support of the family is necessary, as well as help from specialised professionals, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, speech therapists, and neurologists”.

Consequently, it is essential to get to know the teaching-learning processes, in order to be aware of the needs of different social individuals, since this awareness helps to understand their knowledge and symbolic contents, which may often vary when placed in different positions and perspectives.

## **2.4 · Needs in teacher education**

Some beginning teachers argue that some subjects studied in their degrees worked as mobilizing knowledge strategies, enabling them to teach. Moreover, there is a need for complementary theoretical contributions involving specific contents of different fields. These contents are, as individual and social tools, available to us. They must be permanently qualified as a means of illuminating and making reality translucent, which implies reality is subject to their transforming action. However, professional educational development is needed, which, according to Grillo (2001) and others, highlights several issues, such as those relating to different kinds of knowledge, to the teachers’ degree of autonomy and to the practice of epistemological observation.

In the category **Needs in teacher education**, 53.3% of the beginning teachers reported having needs without giving specific details, and 20% mentioned the ‘need for complimentary theoretical contributions involving specific contents from several fields’. Connected with this perspective, it is worth highlighting teachers’ state-

ments: according to “B”, “I assume that it is important to extend knowledge in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, family therapy, education, sciences, mathematics, plastic arts, sociology, history and geography”, whereas “L” said that “degrees in the fields of psychology, phonoaudiology and psychopedagogy provide guidelines and techniques to identify difficulties and work ‘closely’ with them”.

Assessing their initial education, teachers had to give their views concerning the kind of help they needed to do their educational work. This was explicit in the sub-categories: ‘with the institution teaching staff’, ‘with the pedagogical supervisors’ or ‘with people who have additional expertise (e.g., psychologists, social work assistants, and health workers)’, identified by 33.3% of our teachers. Notwithstanding this, 20% of them reported the need for support without giving more specific details.

Education contents and approaches which allowed teachers to acquire skills in different teaching domains were presented in the subcategory ‘*contributions regarding education contents and types*’, which had the following headings: 40% for ‘initial education: education in methodologies’, 20% for ‘initial education: on-the-job training analyses’, 46.6% for ‘general education’, 20% for ‘interdisciplinary modules’, 13.2% for ‘readings’, 6.6% for ‘initial education: on-the-job training’ and, finally, 53.3% for ‘in-service education’.

In the subcategory ‘*contributions regarding specific support*’, 46.5% of the teachers did not specify any kind of need for their classroom work, 33.3% noticed the need for ‘interactions with educators’, 60% of the teachers pointed out the need for ‘interactions with colleagues’, while 53.3% considered ‘interactions with other people relevant’.

In another subcategory, ‘*external contributions*’, only 6.6% of teachers referred to ‘previous education’ as an important factor in their educational activity. None of the teachers mentioned ‘extra-professional experiences’ or ‘previous professional activity’ as having performed an active role in their professional education.

The position assumed by teachers favours reflection on the process of knowledge appropriation and construction, a fact which requires debate and discussion, that is only possible in theoretical and practical dialogue. In the same way, this dialogue can replace exercises and interactive and educational activities. Thus, the content is an available, individual and social instrument for human beings, which can act to shed light on reality, making it translucent, and therefore subject to transforming action. Knowledge is also the understanding of what humanity has acquired from reality, in different and specific periods of history, and it is achieved on a daily basis through interaction and collaborative action between individuals and their realities.

It is worth pointing out that, even in divergence, both cognitive and cultural contents are interrelated. Some teachers argued that several subjects from their degrees motivated them to teach.

Teacher “D” mentioned: “I think the contents of every course was important since it allowed us to learn more, and therefore to have a wider view of teaching. However, I consider that psychology and teaching methods are courses most likely to enable a knowledge exchange and to analyse more thoroughly the human capacity to actually learn”. Teacher “E” stated as well: “Every content is important as it makes you wonder and think”.

According to Grillo and others (2001), the problem of generalising teaching strategies emphasises many features, such as those related to knowledge types, teachers’ degree of autonomy and the practice of epistemological surveillance.

## **2.5 · Trainers’ education needs**

The teacher researchers considered it to be important that theoretical knowledge should be solid, allowing teachers to fulfil their present needs. Any teacher’s approaches are like a network in permanent flux, making the educational processes dynamic and diversified. The elements of these networks are independent and include personal and professional characteristics of the teacher, among many other factors. The process of knowledge acquisition leads to epistemological awareness.

Teachers’ discourses show the importance of in-service education which should be considered a permanent movement in learning how to learn, learning how to think and learning how to act, through different interactions, therefore acquiring knowledge from social, theoretical and practical thinking. This professional understanding goes beyond fragmented visions of knowledge, mechanised procedures, passive routines and domesticated curiosity. According to teachers, as far as pupils’ knowledge is concerned, an essential condition for pedagogical practice is to mobilize, transform and sustain pupils’ interests.

None of the beginning teachers mentioned ‘external contributions’, ‘extra-professional experiences’ and ‘previous professional activity’ as relevant aspects of their professional education. Despite this, we believe that, when it comes to practical knowledge, it is necessary to point out that these external contributions come from teachers’ professional and personal experience and pupils’ daily lives in their social, pedagogical and political contexts. In the unpredictable context of the classroom, teachers are forced to plan their activities repeatedly, supported by practice and life experiences, even though often the teacher may not be aware that everyday life is a valuable source of knowledge in practical situations. We can clearly see this point taken into account in the following statement by teacher “M”: “I saw myself many times as a psychologist, as a friend and a guide to my pupils, with my own childhood and adolescence in the background”.

Concerning the pupils’ knowledge, the main condition for pedagogical practice is to catch their interest, translate and stimulate it. This knowledge should be well engraved in teacher education, so



avoiding the risk of simplifying and reducing what is complex and weakening the possibility of contributing to the construction of a critical social being.

Thus, it is quite clear that theoretical knowledge should be quite solid, to allow teachers' to fulfil their current needs. Any teachers' approach is full of networks, which constantly mutate, making the educational process dynamic, diversified and wider. The elements of these networks are independent and include teacher's personal and professional characteristics, among many other factors. According to the observations of teachers who participated in this research, the different subjects offered in their initial education are important for the practice of teaching. A higher degree of importance was given to Teaching Methodology and Psychology, showing teachers' concerns with the pupils and their learning processes and also with their own knowledge of methodology.

Achieving this knowledge leads to epistemological awareness that is characterised by constant, permanent and explicit self-questioning provided by the school and its knowledge basis. This issue renews the discussion about in-service education, which offers the possibility of insight to cast light on doubts, to reflect on things and knowledge construction, to join and articulate various types of knowledge, so facilitating successful practice.

Knowledge transformation, either at a higher or a lower degree, in a conscious or unconscious way, is a fact of teaching, as we can see in the opinions of the teachers who participated in this research. According to teacher "L", "psychology provided me with many activities, guidelines and techniques to tackle some difficulties". From teacher "I's" viewpoint: "During the degree, this issue belonged only to the contents of psychology, but in practical terms it consisted of thinking how to deal with different cases in the same classroom", and finally, in teacher "A's" opinion: "the teaching methodologies and what was studied in psychopedagogy" were very helpful.

Several teachers stated the importance of additional education, such as specialisations. According to teacher "E": "[specialisations] are always necessary as additional education. As I am finishing a post-graduate degree it is easier for me to find ways to help children overcome their difficulties". In teacher "I's" perspective: "In post-graduate education, the contents of teacher education were very important because they allowed me to analyse my classroom routine and try to reorganise my classes". As for teacher "A": "the teaching methodologies and the materials studied in Psychopedagogy" helped her in her pedagogical work.

This practice, presented by these teachers, shows the need for in-service education. Grillo (2001: 84) understands this by emphasising practical work:

*“docente aberta para a realidade, com um ensino interativo reunindo novas áreas e novos contextos, criando um cenário pedagógico mais rico e amplo. Revisa-se e alarga-se o espaço de ensino e de aprendizagem, que deixa de ser restrito à sala de aula, e passa a considerar também a comunidade próxima ou toda a humanidade, numa perspectiva de comunidade planetária.”<sup>36</sup>*

Consequently, the pedagogical space is “um texto para ser constantemente lido, interpretado, escrito e reescrito, pois, no trato deste espaço, mais possibilidades de aprendizagem democrática se abrem na escola”<sup>37</sup> (Freire, 1997: 109).

Teacher education has to be regarded as a permanent movement of learning to learn, learning to think and learning to be, through diversified interactions and integration of knowledge, starting with social, theoretical and practical reflections. That kind of professional knowledge surpasses a fragmented vision of knowledge, of mechanized procedures, of passive routines and of domesticated curiosity. For Cruz (2002: 200), “É um conhecimento produzido de modo contínuo pela curiosidade epistemológica, pela práxis da pesquisa e do diálogo, pela rigorosidade política e científica, que estimulam a reflexão crítica e a acção transformadora”<sup>38</sup>.



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## Footnotes

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- 32 (Translated by the Translation Office of the Graduate School of Education of Bragança, together with the 4th year Translation students of the school year 2004/2005).
- 33 Translator's note: This degree corresponds to the Brazilian "Curso de Magistério", which qualifies students to teach either in Fundamental Education, from 7 to 14 years old, or in Medium Education, from 15 to 17.
- 34 In this paper both the student teachers and the beginning teachers completed Questionnaire 1 mentioned above.
- 35 Cf. SCHWAB, Gustav. *As mais belas histórias da Antiguidade Clássica*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1994.
- 36 Proposed translation for the excerpt: "better teaching can be carried out by a teacher prepared for reality, with an interactive education gathering together new areas and new contexts, creating a richer and wider pedagogical background. The teaching and learning space should be constantly revised and amplified. This space is now connected not only to the classroom, but also to the community, to humankind, in a worldwide perspective".
- 37 Proposed translation for the excerpt: "a text that has to be constantly read, interpreted, written and rewritten, so, with the development of this space, schools have more possibilities of becoming a democratic place for learning".
- 38 Proposed translation for the excerpt: "it is knowledge produced in a continuous way by epistemological curiosity, by a praxis of research and dialogue, by a political and scientific rigor that stimulates critical reflection and the transforming action".



# Preparing beginning teachers to work with children in some difficulty in Irish schools<sup>39</sup>

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## 1 • Introduction

The present study followed our earlier work<sup>40</sup> concerned with learning difficulties and how to help children who may be at risk of failure in primary school (Rault, Molina Garcia, & Gash, 2001). Our concern is to help beginning teachers prevent school failure, and to contribute to the insights gained collectively during the course of this Comenius project. The approach described here consists of various elements: analysis of data from a questionnaire on teacher preparation given to our final year students in the spring just before they completed their studies; an account of action-research undertaken by six teachers in a primary school on this topic; a reflection by these same teachers on the adequacy of their teacher education and their suggested improvements; and finally the perceptions of recent graduates from St Patricks' College about the adequacy of their teacher preparation.

There are a number of developments in the Irish education

system providing a context to this investigation. First, a revised curriculum was published recently for Irish primary schools (Ireland, 1999). This was the result of a number of years' collaborative work between officials in the Department of Education and Science (DES), teachers and specialists in teacher education. A feature in this curriculum is an increased emphasis on the evaluation of each child's progress in school. Second, the DES made a commitment to provide resources to help children in difficulty. Specifically, additional Resource Teachers were provided and funding was provided for a National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Prior to this, Health Board psychologists identified children in need of remedial education and resource teachers helped these children in difficulty. It is estimated that the numbers of Resource Teachers increased by 2000 between 1997 and 2000. There are also 3800 full time and 1000 part time special needs assistants in primary schools whose role it is to help children in difficulty (Ireland, 2002). The Minister of Education and Science announced in a press release another 350 Resource Teachers to help with children with learning difficulties in schools (Ireland 2004, April 23 <http://www.education.ie/>).

As we noted earlier (Gash, Shine Thompson, & Whelan, 2001), teachers we worked in Ireland with tended to send children-in-difficulty to people outside the classroom rather than accept responsibility themselves. To promote a culture of including children in difficulty in normal class activities, it is necessary to change the ways teachers manage the difficulties of such children. The aim of the present paper is to examine how beginning teachers think about their needs in this area and what might be done to help them help these children during their early years as teachers in schools. If these children could be included at this time, then drawing an analogy with the Head Start Program in the US, enormous amounts of social benefit could result from this positive action ([http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/core/pubs\\_reports/hs/hs.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/core/pubs_reports/hs/hs.html)).

Veenman (1984) reviewed 83 international studies on beginning teachers' problems. The difficulties included classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessment of pupils' work and relationships with parents. In Ireland Edge (1997) studied the concerns of a small number of beginning teachers and categorised their difficulties into personal/internal issues and professional/ external issues. Edge found his teachers felt pre-service teacher education paid insufficient attention to understanding the ways teachers relate with pupils, their parents or guardians. Indeed there are a number of studies showing that the teacher pupil relationship is crucial, particularly in the case of pupils experiencing social and economic disadvantage (Downes, 2004). Ó Síoráin (1982) reported that beginning teachers reported they had difficulty teaching children who were different (weak or bright) and with individual discipline problems. The difficulties of beginning teachers have been acknowledged in the Irish system for over a generation as is indicated by the date of Ó Síoráin's thesis (1982). In response to this awareness

for a number of years teacher induction courses have been offered regularly in Education Centres. Efforts to upgrade and systematise this form of in-service education began in the late 1990s and plans were well advanced in 2000 the first year of the present Comenius project. The Heads of the Departments of Education, together with the teacher unions involved worked with the The Department of Education and Science (DES) who funded a pilot project to mentor beginning teachers in 2002 in both primary and secondary schools. The Irish project is ongoing at present and results of its activities should be available by the end of 2005. It is anticipated that classroom management or discipline and differentiation of the curriculum will be found to be areas of difficulty for the beginning teachers. This induction course is continuing and being expanded on a National level.

I turn now to work done to identify issues identified in the first paragraph of this paper in the preparation of teachers to help children who may be in some difficulty in classrooms.

## 2 · Analysis of Needs of Teachers

### 2.1 · The pre-service student teacher experience

Fifty final year student teachers participated in a survey and were asked questions about their experience of children with educational needs and how well they felt prepared to work with these children in classrooms. Only twenty of these students had some experience of children with special educational needs *before* their teaching practice work in schools.

All of the students reported experience of children in some difficulty *during* their practice teaching work in schools (TP). The children's problems ranged right across the spectrum of learning difficulties. Their variety, as described by the students here, signals practical problems in providing details about how to help all these different types of difficulties adequately in a pre-service education programme. The numbers after each difficulty in Table 1 below refer to the number of students who mentioned this problem: some students mentioned more than one problem.

The students had little difficulty identifying the children in difficulty though in some cases it was clear that teachers helped by mentioning individual children. The students tended to work with the children in individualised instruction settings. This was partly due to the setting the students worked in. It is clear from students' responses that their preparation for teaching led to satisfying educational encounters with these children. To support this view I have selected the following statements taken from the students' questionnaires:

Table 1: Students' descriptions of children's categories of learning difficulties encountered on Teaching Practice

General learning difficulties: spelling numeracy and literacy skills	9
Specific learning difficulties	12
Mild learning disability	4
Moderate learning disability	2
Severe to profound learning disability	2
ADHD	12
Autistic spectrum	3
Down Syndrome	6
ADD	5
Language delay	2
Motor skills	2
Emotional and behavioural problems	8
Memory problems	1
Dyslexia	4
Lack of confidence	2
Hearing difficulties	4
Traveller children with SEN	2
Language needs in non-National children	1
Speech impairment	2
Cerebral palsy	1
A gifted child	1

A. The teacher took the dangerous ADHD child out of the class as my efforts to control her were ineffective – this way I could do my TP. B. During seatwork, I paid special attention to the child with ADD using eye contact and encouragement. C. I encouraged the boy with the speech problem to talk to me and I spent extra time talking with him in playtime. D. I focussed attention on the child with ADHD to help him stay on task and gave him a step by step guide to activities. I encouraged the ADHD child as much as possible and rewarded him for appropriate behaviour. E. Sometimes I moved the ADD child close to me or I moved close to him when the going got tough. (letters refer to different students' replies)



These students had little difficulty in identifying children with problems: they described their speech difficulties, their lack of concentration, and varieties of behaviours that singled out these children. On occasion the teacher provided information on the children's difficulties. It is also clear that this experience of children in some sort of difficulty provided insight for these students.

F. I could identify reading difficulties by observation. G. Principal told me a boy had ADHD. H. I identified non-National needs via the teacher. I. The child with behavioural difficulties was visited by his father for the first time in a long while and improved a lot fast. J. I was told about the behavioural difficulties and saw the reading and writing problems for myself. (letters refer to different students' replies)

Further, the steps they took to work with these children, described next, indicate that they were able to use many ideas presented during their B.Ed. degree. This is most encouraging, and while in later sections of this paper we find that there is room for improvement, or a need for focused in-service interventions, these pre-service students are making well-informed approaches that are professionally well directed.

K. Differentiation within lessons, supplementary resources and other work, parallel reading, activities. I found it helpful to give him more time to express himself, and boosted his self confidence by giving him opportunities to help his peers in maths. L. I ignored the ADHD child as special, but made an effort to include him in group-activities. I also gave him other activities when I had finished working with the others. I tried to overcome phonemic unawareness via individual instruction. M. I sought to involve the ADHD boy as much as possible as class helper handing out worksheets etc. N. I worked with non-Nationals via one-to-one learning, differentiated worksheets, explicit oral guidance and peer tutoring. (letters refer to different students' replies)

Students were also asked to comment on their course work and how this had helped them or how it could be improved. The suggested improvements were predictable in that students recommended that courses that dealt with these issues could be increased in duration and they advised using case studies and videos to improve their understandings. Students suggested also a practical period of teaching practice in a special school so that they might have more experience of these problems, and they suggested integrating the modules on special education into the structure of their education programme. They attribute particular importance to work on special education, assessment, reading and teaching studies, and a course designed to promote awareness about class management issues. A difficulty, from an organisational point of view, is that suggestions as to how to improve the programme are made often in the form of additions and extra work. Interestingly their answers to the question about what helped them most to identify children in difficulty were

extremely varied. They ranged right across a spectrum shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Students' ways of identifying children in difficulty

Group work and one to one teaching	20
Questioning	4
Paired work	1
Observation of children with needs	11
Active or discovery learning	8
Teacher designed tasks	6
Oral language discussions	2
Concept mapping	1
Assessment	7
Task analysis	2
Children playing together	1
Extra resources	5
Explicit teaching <a href="http://www.myread.org/explicit.htm">http://www.myread.org/explicit.htm</a>	7
Drama	2
SPHE	2
Music	1
Maths	1
English writing	1
Playground observation	1

It is encouraging that in the pre-service domain we find that student teachers do not think about children in some difficulty in ways that exclude these children. Rather students show that their programme emphasises differentiation and is sensitive to the process of learning. They are clearly beginning to show that they are moving towards the third and top level of teacher development in Fuller's model of teacher development (Conway & Clarke, 2003).

## **2.2·The experience of beginning teachers in their school: Research Action**

Teachers everywhere are busy people. To find a way to engage them in a project like this study on a voluntary basis in Ireland was difficult. However, in some Dublin primary schools professional development is facilitated through the use of action research. Teach-

ers in such schools are familiar not only with the process of keeping diaries on their work, but also are used to, and confident about, sharing ideas with each other. So action research is an important part of their yearly communal professional activity.

The data in this study were collected in one such school in a disadvantaged area in Dublin. The school was a junior school for children aged 4 to 8. The Principal teacher was very supportive of this project and of the teachers who contributed to it. The 6 participating teachers were all female and all taught children in the first two grade levels in the school. Four were in their first or second year of teaching and the other two had less than four years' experience. Five of them were educated in St Patrick's College, and one prepared for teaching in another country. The teachers met two of the College staff involved in this project in their school in early October 2003 to discuss the project. We explained our wish to understand more about the difficulties that beginning teachers were experiencing with children in some difficulty in their classes. What were these difficulties? How did the teachers cope and what procedures did they put in place to help the children? We explained also that we were interested in ways teacher education programmes could be improved specifically to help beginning-teachers work with children in some difficulty. The teachers agreed to keep action research diaries concerning these matters in the coming months. Plans were also made to talk with the teachers later in the year about how their work had progressed and to collect the diaries produced in their action research.

### **2.3 · Action Research Analysis**

One question we have concerns ways teachers construe children's difficulties. Where are the difficulties located in the teacher-child interface? What is the nature of the problem? We use the teachers' diaries to see whether the problem concerns the child's difficulty with the curriculum material or alternatively if it is a problem in relation to others in the class. The language used may reveal underlying suppositions in the teachers' thinking.

Traditionally teachers in Ireland have taught didactically with lots of talk and very large amounts of teacher-driven learning (Gash, 1985). There is evidence that traditional ways of teaching can be found in many schools in Ireland. Many would say that it is the dominant mode. The official curricula published in 1971, and recently revised in 1999, make the child's learning central (Ireland, 1971, 1999). However, a child-centred revolution is a long way off in many classrooms. The existence and re-emphasis in the 1999 Revised Curriculum of a book of maths exercises might be seen as a counter example to the modern approach it advocates.

One teacher's worries about not having enough workbook activities reveal her desire to ensure that there are suitable activities for the children so that the class as a whole are working. Indeed, the existence of ability groups in her class shows how differentiation is

part of the approach used. In her planning to teach reading, this teacher acknowledges that some of her pre-service teacher education was very helpful, particularly the work in relation to setting up groups. However, now she had many questions about how to organise different types of lessons for these groups.

What follows is a synopsis of each teacher's observations of the children in her class. These observations allow insight into the ways the teacher thinks about learning and their representations of how children should behave in classrooms.

### **Teacher 1 (5 to 6 year olds)**

The behavioural problems described come mainly from three children, a boy and two girls. The boy's behaviour included aggression towards other children, one girl displayed low self-esteem and attention seeking, another refused to work with her group in class. My impression is that the teacher felt that her un-preparedness for these situations made her feel uncomfortable. She turned to support teachers and found her conversations with them helpful. This teacher mentioned also children who came to class late and disrupted the activities planned for the whole group. Teaching reading was difficult on account of the different levels in the class.

### **Teacher 2 (4 to 5 year olds)**

This teacher described seventeen children with problems. She mentioned the children's difficult home situations often and was concerned about how to approach the children's parent or parents. In all but one case the difficulties were behavioural and emotional problems, though language difficulties were also mentioned regularly. She also mentioned problems with fine motor skills (pencil) and with colours. The implicit model of education is one where the children are expected to understand instructions and to know how to do what is expected of them in class. Programmes of education that were more differentiated for these children would make this teacher's life easier. The description of her class was one in which the children are sometimes immature, need individual attention and affection, have poor language skills, and follow instructions with difficulty.

### **Teacher 3 (4 to 5 year olds)**

The third teacher referred to her time management and coming to appreciate ways she could integrate themes into her lessons, rather than try to deal with discrete topics in her teaching. She also mentioned her desire to find ways to try to engage children in activities when they are reluctant participants, either because they are tired or seeking more attention. At present she is challenged because she would like to know more about how to help the children cope with their emotional problems. She also mentioned language difficulties.

**Teacher 4 (4 to 5 year olds)**

This teacher also mentioned language problems, behaviour problems and children with emotional problems who were shy or sulked when asked to behave correctly by the teacher.

**Teacher 5 (4 to 5 year olds) and 6 (5 to 6 year olds)**

The fifth teacher mentioned language problems severe enough in one case that the teacher felt she needed to ensure the child was not teased on account of her speech. The sixth and final teacher mentioned immature behaviour, poor motor skills and disruptive behaviour. She also mentioned a child who has difficulty identifying colours.

The major concerns of these teachers are with behavioural problems, that is, with the unpredictable nature of non-compliant children. There are also some language difficulties and problems that arise in teaching when the children are very different in ability. So while differentiation is present in our teacher education, it can be hard to implement in schools with children of varying ability and perhaps particularly so when there are attendant behaviour problems. Further, the variety and extent of behaviour problems of school children in Ireland is well documented and these difficulties are predictable (e.g., Porteus, 1991). Providing carefully structured help for these teachers to work with children with these problems would make a difference.

### **3 · Survey of St Patrick's College Graduates**

Students who graduated in 2001 and 2002 were surveyed with a questionnaire about their educational experience in St Patrick's College (Morgan, in process). Two educational programmes were involved: our three year B.Ed. degree and our eighteen month post-graduate diploma. Four hundred and sixty eight questionnaires were returned and analysed. One section of the questionnaire dealt with difficulties the students experienced as beginning teachers. As part of the work of our project we had submitted questions for inclusion in the questionnaire. Some of the questions we submitted were included in this section. They dealt with our students' preparation to work with children in difficulty, with discipline problems and with assessment of children. For comparative purposes a number of other teaching dimensions are included in Table three.

The numbers in Table 3 are percentages of beginning teachers ranking each issue's difficulty. Interestingly "relating with parents" is not found to be a difficulty in general. So we may tentatively conclude that it is in meeting parents *about difficult children* that our beginning teachers feel vulnerable. In contrast, their difficulty ratings for curriculum topics are quite low. It may reasonably be speculated that the high ratings given to drama as opposed to music relate to the open nature of drama teaching where teachers may

Table 3: Difficulties Encountered by Teachers

	Very great/ Great difficulty	Undecided	Minor/No Difficulty	Not Relevant
Relating with parents	11.8	4.4	82.7	1.1
Relating with senior colleagues in school	3.7	4.6	89.7	2.2
Maintaining order and discipline	11.4	3.5	83.7	1.3
Relating with Inspectors	8.4	8.2	82.1	3.8
Assessing children	12.8	9.3	77.5	0.4
Catering for children with general learning difficulties	36.2	7.7	51.6	4.6
Catering for children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia)	34.1	6.8	32.2	26.9
Catering for children with emotional or behavioral problems	41.8	7.9	35.4	14.9
Teaching English (reading)	13.6	4.6	81.1	0.7
Teaching English (oral language)	5.1	2.0	92.5	0.4
Teaching Mathematics	9.7	4.0	81.5	0.9
Teaching Geography	3.7	4.2	90.0	2.1

feel more vulnerable to losing control of the children. This would fit with our experience of these teachers in their final teaching practice in their pre-service teacher education, but would require more evidence to substantiate.

It is clear from the ratings for “*catering for children with general or specific learning difficulties, and with emotional or behavioural problems*” - that these are three areas they have identified as problem areas.

Morgan (in process) was able to examine ways that the B.Ed graduates differed from students who were more mature who qualified for teaching via the Post-Graduate Diploma having first obtained a degree other than a B.Ed. It is interesting to note in Table 4 that in all categories listed fewer Post-Graduate Diploma teachers rate them as presenting great or very great difficulty in comparison to their younger B.Ed. colleagues, whether we look at the general issue of discipline, catering for children with different types of difficulty or even teaching different subjects.

Finally, there were a number of items on the questionnaire that dealt specifically with the confidence of these young teachers in dealing with children who were in some difficulty. These items were:

- Overcome the negative influence of disruptive children in my classroom
- Manage children who have a distracting effect on others in the classroom

Table 4: Difficulties Encountered by B.Ed. and Post-Graduate Diploma Students  
(Percent reporting very great or great difficulty.)

	B.Ed.	Post- -Graduate Diploma
Relating with parents	14.1	2.2
Relating with senior colleagues in school	4.5	—
Maintaining order and discipline	13.3	3.4
Relating with Inspectors	6.3	4.5
Assessing children	14.2	6.9
Catering for children with general learning difficulties	39.9	22.7
Catering for children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia)	37.7	19.2
Catering for children with emotional or behavioral problems	46.6	21.6
Teaching English (reading)	14.6	9.1
Teaching English (oral language)	5.1	4.6
Teaching Mathematics	10.9	4.5
Teaching Geography	4.1	2.6

- Help my weakest children when they become discouraged
- Deal effectively with the special needs of children with learning problems
- Help children who are not motivated to study

Again, the graduate diploma students were significantly more confident than the B.Ed students in dealing effectively with these learning problems and helping children who are not motivated (Morgan, in process).

#### 4 • Solutions suggested by the teachers

As we have seen above, in many cases the beginning teachers turn to their colleagues who have responsibility for specialising in one of the variety of problems experienced by children in their school. Schools for children in disadvantaged areas in Ireland have more access to specialised help. In this country we have a wealth of different types of help available (Gash & Thompson, 2004). In the school where we conducted our research the beginning teachers work together in a group for professional development. This is likely to have facilitated their contacting other teachers in the school for help and advice. Contact with families was difficult at best and seemed to be an area for the teachers in our sample where help and experience was needed.

#### **4.1 · Needs arising from a lack in pre-service education**

The teachers who took part in this action research made a number of specific recommendations for improvement in the pre-service programme offered in St Patrick's College. They recommended, for example, work on how to relate to professionals. This would include how to work effectively with parents, colleagues within school e.g., home-school co-ordinator, resource teachers, learning-support teachers, classroom assistants, attendance monitors, and colleagues outside of school e.g., social workers, speech therapists, and child psychologists. They felt there was a need for them to be more aware of the networks of help available to them as teachers in the school.

The teachers were satisfied, in general, with the practical side of the education course. They felt that they were being prepared well to use the curriculum materials in our Revised Curriculum (Ireland, 1999) and to attend to issues such as differentiation and assessment that are emphasised as part of these new approaches. Yet they found the academic nature of some courses meant that students were constrained to memorise large amounts of material for examinations. They felt they could have benefited more from courses offering them additional opportunities to understand how to implement ideas in the classroom. This was especially the case in their course on special education. Some in the group expressed interest in the new work now available in assessment of children. This is a new course some of the group had not taken. They were critical of the more theoretical aspects of the course where it did not touch on practical classroom matters. They specifically mentioned their desire to know more of the practical working side of teaching as part of their work on professionalism in teaching. They were also concerned that they are not awarded any specific recognition for the part of their degree which is "academic", that is 40% of their degree is for work done in an available university discipline (see Gash & Thompson, 2004).

### **5 · Conclusion**

This study confirms that the main difficulties experienced by beginning teachers documented in earlier research remain a feature of beginning teaching. These difficulties include working with children in difficulty with the curriculum, with children who exhibit difficult behaviour and with children who are different from the average children in the class. The initiatives taken in Irish education to promote differentiation within class curricular activities and to include assessment in teachers' work will have an impact on these types of difficulties. Improvement in classroom management skills effects teachers' responses to learning difficulties and while classroom management skills can be expected to improve during the first years of a teaching career so also can teachers expect to acquire the maturity or self-confidence that comes from working and surviving in



stressful environments. It is very important to distinguish between what can reasonably be provided in an improved pre-service education programme, and what should be part of carefully tailored in-service induction courses. An important element in this is to encourage both pre-service teachers and College of Education staff to think of teacher education as a process of life long learning. Indications are that this is a generally recognised need, together with additional time for planning for teachers to work out more individualised programmes for children. The trans-national approach in this project is a welcome opportunity to look freshly at these important issues in teacher preparation.



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## Footnotes

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39 The assistance of Paul Downes and Mary Shine Thompson is gratefully acknowledged.

40 Difficultés d'apprentissage, quels types d'aides en classe et hors de la classe?  
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# Part Two

## A Synthesis of the Preceding Chapters

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# Beginning teachers confront special educational needs in some of their pupils: A synthesis

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## **1 · The context and purpose of the work**

The present study grew out of reflections on a previous study with the title: “*Learning difficulties: what types of help in and out of class?*” by Rault, Molina, & Gash (2001), research based on primary teachers’ ideas about, and educational responses to, children’s school difficulties.

The conclusions of that study indicated that the teachers' ideas concerning causes of school failure were linked mostly to factors external to teaching. The teachers referred to either pupil's deficiencies, or family or social problems, or less often, poor teaching conditions in the school.

If these teachers did not consider themselves responsible for their pupils' failures, most of them however did feel concerned about the pupils' long-term success, without always agreeing on the types and methods of help that could be available to them. We noted great diversity concerning the perception of teachers' roles and personal and professional involvement putting in place specific responses. The importance and the type of help that can be brought by families and outside agencies, whether or not the agencies are institutional partners, are also perceived in many different ways.

The origins of this diversity would be interesting to investigate along with the diversity of teachers' ideas concerning the origins of learning difficulties, but it must also be put in relation to the human and structural resources available, as well as to the official institutional position on this theme in each country. In fact, this needs to be made clear in the context of the history of each educational system. Two strong points come out of that study:

- the conceptual and institutional environment of teachers is a decisive element in their position regarding the success of their pupils;
- understanding the processes of learning allows the teacher to better understand the importance of the quality of the attention paid to pupils, the diversity of educational approaches, the quality of classroom interaction, and the capacity to work in partnership. Also found important was the place that must be given, from pre-service through in-service education, to taking account of pupil's special educational needs.

Our aim in this new study is to find out how beginning teachers, both in primary and secondary education, can take charge of the diversity of special educational needs of their pupils, and how they understand the support available to help them. A first phase of this project, (Rault, 2004), allows us:

- to define the concepts used;
- to establish the comparative status of the legal and institutional context for inclusive education in schools in each country in the study;
- and to study the place given to education about special educational needs in the teacher education programmes in each country.

A second phase consisted of a research action project in each country. This allowed:

- data collection using a questionnaire given to students at the end of pre-service education;
- and data based on beginning teachers' discourses during their first or second year of teaching.

In addition to the summary presented here, each national team published results of the work it had carried out. Their work constitutes the other chapters in this volume.

## **2 · The methodology and characteristics of the sample studied**

### **2.1 · The questionnaire data collected at the end of pre-service education**

The data were collected using a questionnaire given to intending teachers at the end of their last year of study. The project partners in the project constructed the questionnaire. Its aim was to enrich the context of the action research, to describe the teachers' representations about special educational needs, to assess their feelings about the relevance of their pre-service education, to propose a framework of analysis for a follow-up study, and finally to be able to make comparisons between the different countries.

After collecting information about the issues cited above, four open questions were asked:

1. In your practice, you have met pupils with special educational needs. What were they?
2. Can you give at least one example showing us how you dealt with and analysed the difficulty and what were the solutions you were able to suggest?
3. On this occasion, did you feel you needed additional in-service courses or help? If so, explain.
4. During your pre-service education, what were the courses and educational approaches that were particularly helpful?

Initial content analysis of the responses gave a specification of categories allowing a subsequent comparative analysis of results.<sup>41</sup>

### **2.2 · Data collected from beginning teachers during their first or second year of their professional work**

Each educational institution organised data collection from beginning teachers in ways determined by their links with schools, and the constraints on the project team within these institutions. The teachers participating in this research were in charge of their classes for less than two years. The ways this work was done were diverse:

Table 1: Numbers of teachers by country by school type

	Kindergarten Age <6 years	Primary school from 6 to 11/12 years	Middle school from 11/12 to 14/15 years	Secondary school Age >14/15 years
Spain	80	43		
Ireland		50		
Italy	11	34	35	20
France		76		60
Portugal	28	38	35	
Brazil			50	50

- responses to questionnaires;
- development and use of evaluation profiles;
- use of teacher journals;
- discussions between teachers and teacher educators, in the form of meetings to analyse professional practice;
- observations by teacher educators in the form of class visits, followed up by an interview with the teacher;
- support that might be in the form of an in-service course;
- support using web based discussions.

Table 2: Types of data collection by country

Spain	30 teachers, working in different public primary schools in the provinces of Huesca and Zaragoza were investigated using questionnaires during their first year of teaching.
Ireland	7 teachers in their first or second year of teaching in a disadvantaged area in Dublin produced action research diaries and were visited by teacher educators. These teachers also worked in a network with other schools and used a web site listing different support systems. In addition, by means of an evaluation of St Patrick's College's educational programmes, more than 600 questionnaires sent to graduates were analysed that provided a context to the action research data collected.
Italy	The research was conducted with five teachers at both primary and secondary level in two schools. Meetings with teachers, teacher educators and outside experts were organised. A work diary, questionnaires and evaluation profiles were produced. The teachers were invited to observe a child in their classes with special educational needs. These teachers were supported by a group of teacher educators.

France	9 teachers from primary and secondary levels were studied in depth. A group of 26 teachers in primary school, in their first year of teaching, took part in an analysis of their teaching as part of an in-service programme. A group of 30 second level teachers in an alternating pre-service education programme, (alternating school to education institution), was observed to analyse their professional practice. This analysis included class visits by the teacher educators.
Portugal	3 beginning teachers working in primary schools and 4 teachers in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle of basic school in Bragança kept a school journal. Observations and a follow-up were undertaken by the teacher educators. The process used was designed to:- encourage reflection about special educational needs, the types of help available, and the work that was done- to organise for certain pupils, either an adjusted curriculum, or an individual curriculum, or an individual learning contract between the pupil and the teacher.
Brazil	10 beginning teachers of the primary school and 5 studying to be primary teachers kept a school diary and each received three observation visits by the teacher educators in this research.

### 3 · Teachers' identification of pupils' needs

#### 3.1 · Ways teachers identify difficulties

If there are general tendencies we can identify, the institutional context in each country plays a determining role in the process of identifying the difficulty. In the first instance, it seems to be the case that for young teachers - pupils having special educational needs have a legitimate place in ordinary classes even if they recognise that these pupils create difficulties for them. Further, even though aware of the need to welcome these pupils and of the need to provide more specific approaches for them, the teachers feel ill-prepared to identify and analyse the difficulties that they meet. Most of them fall back on personal observations that are not systematic, most often intuitive, and do not use any specific approach or tool.

These observations generally take account on the one hand of classroom behaviour, and on the other of results from assessments, which are better for locating the pupil in terms of average performance than for identifying and analysing the particular difficulty experienced by the pupil. The subjective dimension of this evaluative approach is important in the sense that young teachers take their ideal

imaginary pupil as a reference point. The bigger the distance from this model, the more difficult it is to teach.

These considerations invite comparative reflections:

- in Ireland, where since 2002 the Department of Education and Science (DES) and St Patrick's College have put in place an induction programme for beginning teachers one of the aims of which is to promote differentiation in curricular activities and also emphasises assessment of the children's learning, the teachers seemed at ease in the first phase of this programme. We should add that the culture of systematic evaluation is traditionally more present with the "Anglo-Saxons";
- in Portugal, the process of evaluating the difficulties and the needs of pupils is part of an institutional approach that involves their being taken in charge by teachers. It's a *Local team of coordinated educational support* that is in charge of needs evaluation and which defines the nature of the types of help needed (simple differentiation, adjusted curriculum, or alternative curriculum). This practice seems to introduce unfortunate secondary effects like linking, systematically and exclusively, functional deficiencies and school difficulties. On the other hand, in this context the teachers in ordinary classes feel either helpless, or not concerned, about the analysis of the school difficulties of their pupils;
- in France, where national evaluations allowing the identification and analysis of some of the difficulties met by the teachers have been instituted at different levels of schooling, none of the young teachers in this study made reference to them. This attitude signals an absence of a culture of diagnostic evaluation which is accompanied by a fear of early stigmatisation of the pupils concerned, in particular in the case of young children. One can also notice that the use of these national evaluations has not been built into the system, at each year and at all levels, and this has not encouraged the teachers to give these tools all the formative use that could be made of them;
- in Italy the educational autonomy given to schools has allowed educational services to identify the problems and find the cultural resources and materials to respond. This context has underlined the importance of the role of the head of school and of the professional investment of teachers in the schools' life. Pupil evaluation organised by each school, is made with reference to a national framework. In future these teachers will be helped by a National Institute (INVALSI) responsible to promote specific ways of evaluating and being responsible for pupils' needs.

### **3.2 · Indices of difficulty identified by the teachers**

The difficulties identified by the teachers are located in two big domains, on the one hand classroom behaviour and attitudes and approaches in relation to learning, and on the other, the level of learning achieved in different curriculum areas.

#### **3.3 · Classroom behaviour and attitudes to learning**

Concerning behavioural problems, while some activities that disturb class functioning are well known (physical and verbal aggression, moving about), other attitudes – even if only slightly disturbing – that signal disinterest, or no motivation in school work are also regularly cited as a central problem for the young teachers. These attitudes are most often linked with emotional difficulties that can be attributed to the negative effects of a difficult social and family context. These behaviours are, in a more or less systematic way, attributed to a cause exterior to the school.

The analysis of the answers of the Italian teachers allows us to differentiate the observations of pupils at different school levels:

- in the kindergarten, the attitudes described relate mostly to the social behaviour of the pupil: impulsivity, aggression, and concentration problems. They are often perceived as emotional problems, showing the determination of the child to be noticed and recognised by the adult;
- in the primary school the emphasis is mostly put on the attitudes related to school learning: lack of self esteem, inability to notice competencies, lack of autonomy and absence of motivation;
- in lower secondary school, the teachers emphasise a lack of interest in school that they relate to the difficulties of pre-adolescence. This leads to conflict, physical aggression towards other pupils and verbal aggression towards teachers;
- in upper secondary school, teachers' attention was focussed on difficulties expressed in the emotional and socio-relational spheres.

On this matter, the French team noted that the process of adolescence finds a resonance or mirror image in the relation that the second level teachers have themselves with their own teacher education institution. It may be possible to specify, in relation to teachers, a process of professional adolescence.

#### **3.4 · Insufficient mastery of curriculum domains**

Mastery of the curriculum is generally the first indicator noticed by the teachers who see it as a priority to transmit knowledge and competencies defined in the official curricula. This view is however, more nuanced in our sample of Italian teachers.

For many teachers, it seems that it is the heterogeneity of pupils' school performance that constitutes the first difficulty. These difficulties are mostly identified through the summative evaluations normally carried out in the classroom. They are often associated by the teachers, to a pupil's deficiency or a functional disturbance, obvious or not proven (mental deficiency, dyslexia...) that may lead to difficulties of comprehension or abstraction, to a lack of concentration and attention, or to specific difficulties in language.

Concerning this last aspect, it is interesting to note differences in the importance of language difficulties in the countries sampled. If the French teachers, at all levels, and the teachers in Aragon in Spain consider poor language abilities as a major factor in very many pupils' school difficulties, the teachers in other countries do not agree. They see it most often as a problem relating to children for whom the first or material language is not that used in the school (the delay between the language of the school and of the family) or else, they consider language as a learning area like the others. This finding leads to the thought that what is meant by the phrase "*language mastery*" in France and Spain covers, essentially, competencies perceived elsewhere as relating to another domain such as organisation, or the structure and the expression of thought.

This comment leads to an interesting reflection on the place that is allocated to the first language in the development of cognitive processes. In addition, generally the teachers rarely associate a child's school failure with the faulty solutions or ineffective cognitive approaches tried. What is most often cited is a lack of trying, or poor motivation described as not trying, particularly when talking about older pupils.

The analysis of the Irish teachers responses allows us to notice the disconcerting effect of unpredictable reactions by non-compliant pupils, who are seen as not behaving as expected. This finding, also found in the other countries, shows how important is the idea of the "ideal pupil" in the mind of all teachers: a disciplined pupil, who is obedient, quick, responsible and interested, a long way from the "real pupil". The young teachers, and sometimes the less young, have a hard time forgetting this ideal pupil, who if s/he existed, would come along and say how good this teacher was. Whatever the cause, it is clear that the pupils who present with difficulties also put their teachers in difficulty and the solutions proposed for their needs are the proof.

#### 4 · Responses given by the teachers

While the dominant feeling is a lack of specific competencies and of know-how on the part of the young teachers, in all the countries concerned, their responses mostly point to the conviction that it is their task and their responsibility to respond to their pupils special needs. This finding is decisive and already points to a positive



development in comparison to our earlier results. Another essential element, and largely shared by the teachers, is being convinced that these pupils have real potentialities that the school must develop.

Concerning the data collected, one can distinguish two big axes, on the one hand the personal educational approaches of teachers in their classes, and on the other, their turning to help from different partners or support systems.

#### **4.1 · Turning to help from support partners and support systems**

Everybody emphasised “individualisation” and “personalisation” without making it clear whether this is about the pupil’s personal work, or a personal relationship between pupil and teacher, or of the development of an individual educational programme in respect of a pupil. Complementary information is needed to allow us to distinguish between the different approaches proposed:

- the tutorial is indistinctly indicated;
- the Spanish and Portuguese teachers emphasise the importance given to information that can be collected from pupils, on observation of classroom behaviour and the analysis of their difficulties in order to establish a “programme of personal work” which can take the form of an “adjusted curriculum” or of an “alternative curriculum”;
- the Portuguese teachers make reference to the adjustment of educational materials, the time spent in class, and to the practice of evaluation, they insist also on the importance of enhancing pupil/teacher interactions;
- the French and Brazilian teachers talk more often of “individualised projects” and of “differentiated education”;
- the Italian teachers refer to “new approaches principally focused on motivations, interests and achievements of pupils”;
- and finally, help given by the teacher “outside school time” is also cited (Ireland, Brazil).

The research also showed changes in the pupils’ attitudes towards learning: “using co-operative learning” (Ireland, Brazil), “expressive activities like role-play, reinforcing the pupils’ autonomy, developing self esteem, and developing the ability to appreciate school achievements” (Italy). The teachers also used approaches that emphasise “active learning approaches” (Ireland).

Another approach emphasised the personal relation that the teacher established with the pupils: “being firmer” or “being more flexible” (France), “being firmer”, “more attentive”, “closer” (Brazil), “striving to establish an educational relationship based on confidence and support” (Italy), “empathy” (Portugal), “dialogue with the pupil” (France and Italy), and “educational contract” (France).

So, while teachers perceive as essential the personal relation established between pupil and teacher, it seems hard to describe its nature. This leads to lots of uncertainty about the best attitude to adopt.

#### **4.2 · Asking for help from support partners and support systems**

The following proposals are generally cited by all the teachers but some are mentioned more often:

- initial support is sought from the “teaching team” in the school and the emphasis is put on “team work” (Italy and Brazil);
- help from “specialist teachers with a specific expertise”, which could give information to the pupil, and advice but also, regularly, provide help to the pupil (Ireland, Brazil, France, Spain);
- calling on “social services” and on “health services”, thought by others as not sufficiently developed or not really accessible by teachers (Ireland, Portugal, Brazil);
- encouraging “work with families as partners” is cited by all the teachers, with the exception of French teachers, even if this latter group consider the parents as implicated in the origin of the difficulties experienced by their pupils and if the school system strongly encourages closer links with families.

The teachers, as a whole, would like to benefit from specific supports which could bring to bear different partners, but they usually find it difficult to meet them and to use them on account of their small numbers or their lack of availability.

### **5 · Needs expressed by teachers**

#### **5.1 · Courses on special educational needs**

The teachers in this study most often find their pre-service education courses in this area to be lacking and would like improvements made:

#### **5.2 · Better preparation to work with children of different ability levels**

- “more value placed on pupil diversity” (Italy)
- “a more extensive approach on the diversity of pupil needs” (Portugal)
- “more emphasis on courses on special educational needs” (Portugal and Spain)
- “courses on approaches to specific types of support and on the development of individual educational projects” (Italy, France), and on “classroom organisation and group dynamics” (Spain).

### 5.3 · Teaching approaches and psychology re-examined

- “deepening the understanding of the learning process” (Brazil)
- “additional work with curriculum contents and methods” (Italy)
- “a more integrated and cross disciplinary approach to teacher education” (Portugal)

### 5.4 · An approach with a better blend of theory and practice

This request was unanimous.

- “Teacher education should be built on a continual blend of theory and practice, which must be present right through the whole process, and related to classroom practice.” (Portugal)
- “This blend could inform case studies, discussions with specialists, and be brought to bear in difficult classes.” (France)

The value of participating in action research, like that undertaken in this present study, is also mentioned in each county as an interesting approach for teacher education.

Other more specific points appear and are linked to specific institutional contexts:

- “teacher education on special educational needs should also be useful for kindergarten teachers” (Portugal)
- “academic recognition for in-service education by universities” (Ireland)

### 5.5 · Encouraging partner relations

Everyone perceives this need, it is most clearly expressed by some who indicate that they look forward to professional relationships in an expanded partnership:

“We need to work more closely with different colleagues and use a common language, have the same level of urgency about our work and seek solutions together for the problems we meet. It is important to build strategies of partnership. We are happy to bring our pupils to psychologists or to speech therapists, but teachers need better contacts with these professionals. It’s the same issue with the relationships with families, we need to build a network allowing us to look together for a common strategy to bring better support to pupils” (Brazil);

If outside help is asked for, neither “must it dominate” (Italy), nor “remove the teachers from their role” (Portugal). This support can take the form of “help to develop and guide projects” (France), or a “laboratory for projects allowing better diffusion of innovative practices” (Italy);

In all these cases, these supports must “promote the types of school learning at the heart of the class” (Brazil), however they must be concerned as much with the pupil’s social as school context.

The data collected in this study should be viewed in the institutional context of each country with its different partnerships and slightly different functions. The teachers also seemed to call for help from the partners to allow them to better deal with the difficulties they meet in their classes.

## **6 · Findings and reflections.**

These findings and proposals are the result of the reflection undertaken in each national team on the basis of their analyses of reactions of beginning teachers participating in this study.

In general, preparation for welcoming children to school and for beginning effective schooling of all pupils in ordinary schools seems generally accomplished, even if in certain countries, like France and Brazil, this aspect is not yet sufficiently planned in initial teacher preparation. In any case these are contemporary issues implicated in global processes of democratisation and of non-discrimination. It remains, however, to determine when and how to respond to the pre-service needs felt and expressed by the teachers.

On the other hand, one finding was common to many participating countries: the difficulty, indeed the institutional impossibility, to organise a follow up of young professionals by their pre-service educators while they were in their first jobs in schools. This has the consequence that links cannot be made easily between pre-service education and in-service needs.

If some causes can be attributed to institutional ways of working and to ways of organising pre-service education, other causes can be linked with the position and status of different actors, and with national conceptual variations.

### **6.1 · Pre-service education**

Clearly pre-service education plays a central role in awareness raising and also in acquiring useful and necessary competencies for beginning teaching.

#### **6.1.1 · The process of pre-service education**

- **A plan of pre-service education centred more on the learner, whether a pupil...**

Pre-service education should allow in equal degree understanding of pupil learning and understanding of the process of teaching (Brazil and France). In this perspective, it seems wise, in relation to pre-service teacher education, to promote “processes of pupil learning” in comparison to “processes of teaching” (Italy).

- **...or a teacher...**

Giving a place to the learning dimension supposes “not highlighting the previous schooling and personal history of anyone” (Italy), “to become aware of ingrained prejudices, in particular the image of the ideal child that we all possess, and to work starting from the preliminary representations to allow them to develop” (France).

- **...and on a dialectic approach what is both particular and universal**

In relation to the problems that concern us, to know about the diversity of pupils in public education, “a reflection is needed on the respective emphasis of the particular and the general” (Brazil). “The dialectic, between the heterogeneity of the whole class on the one hand and of special needs on the other, invites a rethinking of practices which while emphasising the importance of recognising each child’s specific needs, can find ways of working with groups of children” (France).

### 6.1.2 · Pre-service courses

- **Disciplinary and scientific knowledge**

Some types of courses, so-called “academic”, which are deemed important for some and much less important for others, like developmental psychology for children and adolescents, the psychology of learning, or teaching specific disciplines - require emphasis in specific ways in different countries.

- **Integrative and thematic approaches**

We should note especially, that these integrative and cross disciplinary approaches allow a better focus on the question that centrally concerns us here: “in pre-service education, it is the integrative approaches (in particular those in modules that are thematic) that allow beginning teachers to get a grip on ways of identifying and taking account of pupils’ educational needs” (France). These are often activities presented in very specific pre-service educational modules, relatively marginal in relation to the more academic modules: “most teachers’ required pre-service education is acquired in lectures, seminars or specific courses, focussed on certain aspects of educational difficulties, and they also have access to documentation about particular points” (Spain). It is important to note that these courses which are marginal, optional and not integrated in the compulsory course are insufficient to allow the development of real learnings in the young teachers.

- **Mastering professional techniques**

In any case the cause which seems to have been predominant concerns everything that allows pedagogical differentiation and which presupposes knowing about:

- developing and using appropriate and suitable tools that allow observation and diagnostic and formative evaluations;
- put in place learning and teaching approaches;
- develop and use “special curriculum approaches” or “individual projects”;
- managing the learning dynamics of heterogeneous groups;
- developing competencies in relation to language mastery;
- facilitate relational competencies between pupils and their expressive abilities (through dialogue, role play...).

### 6.1.3 • Approaches to pre-service education

There are some major principles that emerge from the propositions made by the national teams:

- **the articulation between theory and practice**

- During pre-service education, it seems necessary “to have a really formative experience with pupils with special needs and not just simply contact with them. This experience should take place with a teacher experienced in this area” (Spain).
- “The process of learning and of constructing knowledge, that requires contact, questioning and a critical spirit, is only possible in the context of a theoretical-practical dialogue and, from this, traditional didactic-pedagogical activities need to be replaced with this type of dialogue (Brazil).”
- “It is necessary to take account of theoretical elements even in the daily teaching activities. In planning pre-service education of teachers one must be explicit about how theoretical knowledge influences the ordinary daily activity of the teacher (Italy).”
- Having strong theoretical references is important because it allows teachers to exercise an epistemological vigilance characterised by constant questioning, explicitly on the knowledge transmitted in the school and on basic reference knowledge (Brazil). If the connection between theory and practice is unanimously affirmed, it seems also that the separation, more or less strong depending on the country, between the terrain – that is the schools, and the institutes of pre-service education, often is a major obstacle to relating theory and practice effectively.

- **the benefits of exchanging experiences and sharing**

Sharing ideas with colleagues requires being open to cooperation, but also knowing how to locate oneself in a group of professionals whose goals and competencies are clearly identified:

- “The work on communication between professionals and parents should be developed. It is necessary to be clearer in teacher preparation about the different types of help available in the school so that the teachers can work more effectively in the class (Ireland).”
- “The lack of confidence of beginning teachers in respect of knowledge of support services is alarming. This problem could be resolved perhaps by explaining practically the aims and functions of these services during initial teacher preparation (Spain).”
- Working in a team with other professionals requires knowing one’s professional place in the team, but it seems that this is very often not the case. – “The young teachers do not know well the school organisation within which they work, and are not clear about the roles of the different people in the school, including their own roles” (France). This lack of knowledge is a fundamental handicap in the building of professional links based on the legal status and professional competencies of the different types of teachers in the school.

## **6.2 · In-service education**

“It is important to distinguish between what can be reasonably learned in an improved initial teacher education programme and what should be part of an induction programme for beginning teachers supported by suitable in-service education (Ireland).”

### **6.2.1 · In-service education as professional development**

In-service education is perceived mainly as the essential vehicle that permits teachers to pursue and deepen their acquisition of competencies to respond to the individual special needs of their pupils. The teachers are therefore clearly responsible for their pupils and really involved in the educational environment. In the long term, an effective in-service education programme is needed that is the result of reflection, questioning and evaluation. Also, pre-service teachers should be encouraged to think of their education as a process that will continue throughout their professional lives (Ireland).

#### **6.2.2 · Promoting continuous reflection**

“Teacher education should be understood as a continuous process consisting of learning to learn, learning to think, learning to be, through diverse interactions, in order to integrate knowledge in a

socio-theoretical-practical reflexion. This type of professional development should be beyond breaking down knowledge, mechanical procedures, passive routines, and dampened curiosity (Brazil)."

### **6.2.3 · Teacher as actor and researcher**

"The findings coming out of this research show again that teacher preparation, behind the desk, as Paulo Friere characterised it, should be replaced by learning in and for activity, following project methodology (Portugal)".

"Professional knowledge should be built, in a continuous way, through research, dialogue, and rigorous scientific approaches. It should take into account the teacher's practice, building on *epistemic curiosity* and be stimulated by critical reflection and action (Brazil)."

"The universities and other institutions should be involved more centrally in the in-service education of teachers by proposing initiatives or theoretical reflections linked with daily educational practice, educating through using observation techniques, teaching tools adapted to specific educational needs, in putting in place concrete educational procedures that can be evaluated by qualitative and quantitative methods (Spain)". This presupposed integrating the beginning teachers in research programmes, that we can describe as carefully defined financially supported development-innovation programmes.

"Action research is identified as the best method, in the context of in-service education, because it is the result of effective and lived educational experience; it should be supported by reflective practice that allows teachers to appreciate their work without the risks of a pedestrian empiricism." (Italy).

In addition, action research encourages creating reflective groups focussed on the knowledge necessary for good practice. These groups should also be places for reflective discussion and criticism. They should aim, by de-contextualisation, to generalise practical knowledge, and so allow this knowledge to transfer to diverse situations.. We can then build "a community of practices of the teaching world in continuous evolution" (Italy).

### **6.2.4 · The decisive importance of specific in-service activities carefully targeted and institutionalised**

"In-service education should be organised and structured so that all teachers can learn something about special educational needs, and not in the form of elective options offered as part of an in-service programme presented as a selection of individual choices from a list of proposals." (Portugal)

"It is clear that the model of in-service education that is being proposed here, in tight cooperation with the universities, requires both a profound change in the mentalities of university boards and resolute support from the educational administration (Govern-



ment). If the universities continue to remain self-focussed and if the educational administration (Ministry, local or national) considers in-service teacher education unimportant and to be left to the free choice of each teacher, one can understand why our teachers express a loss of confidence in this type of in-service education.” (Spain)

#### **6.2.5 · The risks of an absence or an insufficient education**

“The absence of education, of supervision and of resources, relating to specific educational needs could provoke amongst teachers a rejection of pupils with specific educational needs.” (Portugal)

“The emphasis is placed here on the importance of in-service education in relation to special educational needs. It should be relevant, coherent and on account of this be one of the important and decisive conditions for pupils with these needs to have quality schooling. Actually, research has shown that the presence of children or young people with special educational needs in a class, when the teacher has not been prepared for this and there is no support, results most often in reinforcing pre-existing negative ideas about special needs, and so produces a situation that is unhelpful to children in difficulty (Gash, Guardia Gonzalez, Pires & Rault, 2000).

## **7 · In conclusion, some recommendations**

The collaborative work of teacher educators and beginning teachers using action research has allowed insight into school work, to reflect, to discuss in both national and trans-national groups and to make recommendations. In the perspective of the best response to pupil’s special educational needs, there are a number of strong and consensual points of agreement concerning an evolution in the conception of teacher education and the practices of teacher educators.

### **7.1 · Defining common reference principles**

#### **7.1.1 · Reaffirming the values and principles basic to the school’s mission**

Teacher education must explicitly reaffirm the values and principles basic to the schools’ mission and without which no particular attention might be paid to pupils with special educational needs:

- to be open to democratisation and quality teaching to allow each future citizen to participate fully in the life of the democracy;
- to make pupils aware of and to live the principle of non-discrimination
- to affirm the dimension of individuality by respecting universal principles of human rights
- to create a social desire to live together and of a humanism of difference

### **7.1.2 · To approach the profession of teachers in its complexity**

To efficiently inscribe their activities in this perspective, teachers need to be helped to perceive the complexity of their task through a systematic approach allowing them to see their mission in its different dimensions: the historic and political, the institutional and legal, the cultural, the social and the affective. This presupposes that they know how to locate themselves, as professionals, in contexts of diverse situations and with many different types of partners.

One task, too often ignored in teacher education, is how to introduce pre-service teachers to important ethical and philosophical references, and to understand fully how schools work and what resources are available to them there as professionals.

### **7.1.3 · To challenge the strong normative expectations**

In the everyday practice of the classroom, to conform faithfully to the demands of the established norms is to deny the diversity of pupils' own learning situations, and a priori, to walk away from seeking equality of opportunity. So it is therefore urgent, in the process of teacher education, to question the "streaming" and "ability groupings" communally taken as natural and unchangeable, and all too often seen by teachers as legitimate and reassuring.

At the same time, to deconstruct is not to destroy, it is to be able to question concepts, cultures, and habits of organisations that tend to classify individuals in categories which often become ghettos. It is to develop the capacity to recognize the other in each of us and not apart from ourselves. This presupposes also passing from the concept of integration to that of inclusive education which has a corollary to deny exclusion, whatever might be the motive, a deficiency, or specific personal difficulties, but also might be economic, social, or cultural factors ... and to accord each child, to each young person, a right to be welcome in the heart of the school community and to benefit from personal educational help if this is needed to learn and grow.

However, paradoxically the school, which must be open to diversity, is also the place to build a civic community, and this double requirement obliges teachers to place themselves in an uncomfortable dynamic with permanent tension, *the individual and the universal, the particular and the collective, personal identity and shared culture.*

## **7.2 · A conception of teacher education**

### **7.2.1 · Passing from the culture of vocation to the culture of profession**

Teacher education should allow teachers to acquire a legitimate professional status that presupposes knowledge, technical know-how and professional judgment.

To do this one needs to:

- to make available, in line with theoretical references, tools and approaches, to observe, to make assessments, to identify needs and organise individualised programmes;
- to set up in-service courses where one learns to work more effectively: the possibility of joining an action research group can allow making hypotheses linked with theoretical ideas and knowledge, and to not only put in place new learning approaches but to evaluate them;
- to put in place a multidimensional analysis of one's professional situation, that is sufficiently distanced from one's practice;
- to permit teachers to become involved in a dynamic of professional exchanges with different partners. This presupposes the ability to listen as much as to talk: to be able to share methods and analyses to allow school development, in a desire to grow together; to make explicit methods and choices; to take account of the roles of the different actors, such as the parents, in a perspective of co-education.

### **7.2.2 · Construct a “professional personality” - to allow it to evolve and develop**

In the activity of teacher education, one cannot ignore the development of a refined competence in the domains of discipline and teaching, it is also necessary to become more sensitive to others and to develop one's emotional intelligence.

The teacher is an individual with a very personal and multifaceted life experience. To value the individual in the educational community is a challenge underlined by Edgard Morin “The relation to the other is inherent to the relation to oneself.” In fact, taking account of special educational needs depends on the way the teachers' needs are considered part of their professionalisation. To recognise teachers' uniqueness in teacher education, is to accept the idea that their experience determines the way teachers will invest in the profession and allows them to develop a “professional personality”. This recognition introduces a mirror that shows an opening showing diversity and individuality and which facilitates practices allowing a match between the help offered to pupils and the needs that are really theirs.

Our action research has been significant because it allowed, in working with beginning teachers, to bring them significant help in relation to their needs. It allowed them to build competencies relevant to their needs. This type of induction process seemed also like an excellent educational tool that engaged each teacher, in an individual way, in a dynamic of development of their “professional personality”.

### **7.2.3 · Plurality and continuity to characterise the process of teacher education**

To transmit these values and put in place this conception of teacher education, it seems evident as a result of this work, and whatever the educational system in which each of us is involved, that these two transversal principles of plurality and of continuity must guide our activities as teacher educators. They are the guarantees of respect for personal diversity and also of the unity of a democratic educational project.

First of all, it is important to present a variety of approaches that allow an opening up, at the level of persons, of institutions and of ways of organisation: we need varieties of teacher educators and presenters, varieties of place and of contexts for teacher education and varieties of ways of presenting courses.

It is in fact essential that teacher education is undertaken by a variety of presenters (universities, practitioners, institutions..) which are not themselves limited by their specific time and space constraints. Each of these teacher educators must be able to contribute, with their own expertise, to a common educational programme which doesn't shy away from the complexity of reality.

On the other hand, teacher education must be considered as a dynamic process that develops throughout the whole career. Each person builds competencies on the basis of their own history and in diverse contexts as a life long continuous process. So it isn't desirable to propose courses that impose discontinuities between initial teacher preparation and in-service, or between theoretical and practical courses.

Finally, each teacher should be able to benefit from help, certainly at the beginning of their careers, but also at times where they find a need. This help should not be considered uniquely as a help and support to the teacher but also as an opportunity to give life to an effective process of research, of reflection, and of acquisition of new knowledge, as much for the benefit of the person being educated, as for the institution in which they work.

To prepare beginning teachers to take account of special educational needs is to help them build their "professional personality" and to allow them to master the complexity of a teacher's mission by learning to coordinate the many parts of the classroom so that it is whole. It is also to convince them that they contribute, with those who work with them, to build a democratic society respectful of all its members.

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## Appendix:

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## Appendix 1: Categories established after analysis of the contents of the questionnaires

QUESTION N° 1	
In your work, have you met pupils who have particular difficulties? What were they?	
0.	No response to the question
1.	Indicators of difficulty mentioned by the teachers
1.0	No indicators of difficulty
1.1.	Behavioural difficulties
1.1.1.	Disturbing the class (aggression, physical violence, verbal violence, being agitated)
1.1.2.	That do not disturb the class (being absent, being late, passive, closed in on himself or herself.)
1.1.3.	Difficulty in involvement, making an effort (work not done, unmotivated)
1.2	Learning difficulties
1.2.0	School failure without analysis
1.2.1.	Language mastery
1.2.2.	Comprehension, abstraction
1.2.3.	Mastery of curriculum areas
1.2.4.	Relation to work (lack of autonomy, concentration difficulty, organisation.....)
2.	Details of explanations given
2.0.	No explanations
2.1.	Problems related to the developmental processes of the child or adolescent
2.2.	Emotional problems
2.3.	Deficiencies
2.3.1.	cognitive problems (so language problems)
2.3.2.	sensory problems
2.3.3.	motor problems
2.3.4.	sickness, health problems
2.4.	Socio-cultural problems
2.5.	Other problems extrinsic to the child
2.5.1.	Disengaging from the family, voluntary or not, (because of death, separation, absence...)
2.5.2.	Paid activity of the young person, parallel to school attendance



QUESTION N° 2	
Can you give us at least one example which shows how you have identified and analysed the difficulty and what solutions you have proposed?	
0.	Absence of response to the question
1.	Way of identifying the difficulty
1.1.	Not answered
1.2.	From direct observation, without a specific analysis tool
1.2.1.	Observation of behaviour and attitudes
1.2.2.	Direct observation of the child's "level" of performance
1.3.	From information accessed outside class
1.3.1.	The pupil's file
1.3.2.	Information from another person in the school
1.3.3.	Information from another person outside the school
1.3.4.	Information from the pupil's parents
1.3.5.	Information from the pupil concerned
1.4.	From evaluations made by the teacher
1.4.1.	National evaluations
1.4.2.	School evaluations



## Footnotes

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41 The categories are presented in the Appendix.



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